

S E R M O N S

ON

VARIOUS SUBJECTS.

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FELLOW OF EXETER COLLEGE, OXFORD.

SECOND EDITION.

L O N D O N:

PRINTED FOR T. CADELL, IN THE STRAND.

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450

VARIOUS SUBJECTS



BY JOHN H. ...

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF STAFF
WASHINGTON, D. C.

SECOND EDITION.

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PRINTED FOR T. CADELL, IN THE STRAND.

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MICAH vi. 8.

He hath shewn thee, O Man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

THE Prophet has very happily enumerated the essentials of Religion in this short, but comprehensive sentence. Destitute of these virtues, although a man should possess a faith so strong, as in the metaphorical language of the Apostle, to remove mountains, though his zeal were the most ardent, and his regard to the ceremonial part of Religion, the most punctual, yet would this vigorous faith, yet would this ardent zeal, and all this observance of external forms be as the barren tree, whose branches yield no fruit in

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due season. True Religion consists not in the accurate investigation of an intricate scriptural text, in eloquent harangues on the Christian revelation, or in a beautiful display of the loveliness of virtue; for then the learned divine were the most religious, and the man of genius, who can speak and write with eloquence on moral subjects, were the most virtuous. Now this would be a very wrong conclusion; for it is known that men may act contrary to knowledge, and speculate in opposition to practice. The licentious may appear warm in the cause of chastity, and the drunkard be loud in the praise of temperance. Thus we may plead for piety with great earnestness, we may exalt the effects of a lively faith, may talk with seeming affection of the Redeemer's goodness, and expatiate, in all the glowing colours of description, on the virtues of his godlike character; the general tenor of our deportment may be marked by a peculiar reservedness, and our countenance by the reverential pomp of aged gravity—yet does it not follow, that we are religious; yet does it not follow, that we imitate the example of Christ. Words are but sounds, which die away with the voice; and that unbending severity of features may be no
more

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more than hypocritical grimace to cover some pernicious worldly scheme. The spirit of true Religion is not less averse from such unmeaning formalities, than heat is to cold, or light to darkness ; it rests not in bare principle, but it demands activity of practice. If the Christian system were a principle only, a field of speculation to amuse the mind, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the morality of the antients, which consults the happiness of the human race, by decrying vice, and extolling virtue. And, yet it is to be apprehended, that they, who assert the all-sufficient influence of faith, independent of moral actions, reduce the revelation of Christ to this degrading inferiority. The arguments on this subject are very copious, and a minute discussion might engage us too far in the controversy. We shall content ourselves with taking a view of the virtues recommended in the text, and see how far they contain the whole of Religion.

Placed as we are in a state of dependance upon each other, there must of necessity exist a certain intercourse among us, supported by the reciprocal exertion of virtues, which connect, and advance the general good. And

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none, in the enumeration of these, is of greater importance to the welfare of mankind, than justice. By the influence of this excellent principle, men are cemented together in bonds of unity, the rights of private property are guarded, the fair dealings between man and man, in their commercial interests, are preserved, the peace of society is secured from the rude hand of violence, or the more dangerous stratagems of superior cunning, the pure name of innocence is unstained by the pestilential breath of slander, the poor is free from oppression, and mutual confidence pervades the various walks of civil life. The man who does justly, maintains the most equitable exactness in his connexions with his fellow-creatures. He bestows on all impartially their due. He takes no advantage of ignorance to enhance the value of any commodity. He strives not to accumulate riches, by deluding the credulous and inexperienced. Unskilled in all that low cunning, by which too many thrive in the world, he employs no fraud to deceive, no arts to circumvent. No extortions, no usuries disgrace his equitable conduct; the spirit of avarice has no dominion in his pure and upright bosom. A stranger to artifice, he

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is utterly unacquainted with that selfish narrowness of mind, which, forgetting the dignity of human nature, stoops to the meanest actions, for the acquisition, perhaps, of some trifling pecuniary emolument. He never blackens the reputation of another, nor wishes to build the foundations of his prosperity on the ruins of a rival's fame. He despises from his heart that cruel busy disposition, which propagates the tale of scandal, and too often mars the domestic happiness of families, and sows the seed of irreconcilable hatred among friends and neighbours. He adopts no subtle evasions, no hypocritical speciousness, no casuistical sophistry to disguise the truth; his actions are honest and open; and the golden rule, which can never be too deeply engraved on the tablets of the memory, which can never be too often sounded in our ears, do unto all men as you would they should do unto you, is the best delineation of his character.

Thus far, in conformity to the order of the text, we have drawn the first characteristic in the portrait of the religious man. The exact observance of justice, however, is by no means the sole criterion to form our

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idea of goodness; for no virtue is more easily abused. We may assume the semblance of justice from a thousand self-interested reasons. Regardless of the approbation of God, or the happiness of our brethren, we may assume it to preserve a certain reverence to our persons; or to lull suspicion asleep, and prevent others from prying too deeply into our crafty designs; we may assume it to screen under that specious veil a multitude of defects from the observing world. These, you know, were the principal colours in the Saviour's description of Pharisaical hypocrisy. They were extremely rigorous in the performance of the minutest acts of external justice, and omitted the weightier matters of the law, mercy, and faith. These ought they to have done, and not to have left the other undone. Then, with great aptitude of comparison, he assimilates them to whited sepulchres, which fix the beholder's admiration by the beauty of their outward ornaments, the elegance of the design, and symmetry of the figures; but contain, within their gloomy vault, the loathsome carcases of dead men, and all uncleanness. So the Pharisees, imposing on the judgment of mankind by their pretended regard to this virtue, affected the reputation of just and good, while
their

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their heart, the horrid sepulchre within, was polluted by pride, revenge, and cruelty, and all the train of malignant passions.

Hence we clearly see, that to compleat the religious character, some other virtues must be associated with justice. The prophet therefore, by a very proper gradation, has connected mercy with it; to do justly, and to love mercy. By this expression he certainly understands charity,—disinterested generous charity, the noblest branch of social virtue. This admirable, and admired, this lovely, and beloved accomplishment, is as much superior to justice, as the costly glittering diamond to the rough unpolished stone. Nay, the former includes the latter perfection; for a man may be just without charity, but he cannot be charitable without justice. But why did I barely say, that mercy includes justice, when every grace and every virtue, which can form the Christian, are comprehended in this most sublime and beneficial principle. As the rivers, which roll over the surface of the earth, meet in the ocean, so do all the virtues that embellish human life center in charity. The charitable man will admit no principle, will indulge no appetite, which interferes

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with the peace of society. His life runs in one uniform tenor of temperance, of mildness, of humility. Those turbulent and destructive passions, which trouble the repose of the world, have no existence in his generous heart. Time and glowing benevolence have subdued their rage. He truly fulfils the scripture admonition, never to let the sun go down upon his wrath. That deep resentment of affronts, which settles in a dark and gloomy spirit, and broods over a thousand schemes of revenge, is unknown to his gentle mind. Charity suffereth long and is kind. He meets the apology with eagerness, he relents and forgives. His notions being enlarged beyond the common bounds of narrow prejudices, he feels none of those little jealousies which agitate vulgar souls; he discovers no envy at the encreasing wealth of his successful neighbour, but rejoices at his prosperity. If you excel him in wisdom, in learning, or in genius, he disdains that ignoble artifice of sinking you down to his own level, by speaking lightly of your talents, or by bestowing the tribute of a faint unwilling praise. He loves, he exalts real merit. Charity thinketh no evil. His benevolence to all mankind is so warm and affectionate, that, unlike the common practice of the world, he listens with
reluctant

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reluctant ear to those who delight to record the errors, and the faults of others. His humane, and forbearing nature is touched with grief by the conduct of those severe inexorable judges, who, secure themselves from temptation by the coldness of age, by their infirmities or by their solitary life, presume to pass the rigid sentence on the most trivial inadvertencies. He makes a candid allowance for the frailty of nature, he puts the most favourable construction on a dubious matter; and when the tongue of satyrical slander, like the microscope which discovers and magnifies the least roughness on the most polished surface, displays and exaggerates the few blemishes of a character, otherwise amiable, he delights to soften, or do away the unfriendly invective. A difference in religious sentiments will not extinguish a spark of his glowing love to his brethren. He knows that man is not able to resist the force of opinions; and that however Christians may vary in their manner of worship, they are still disciples of the same beneficent master, are enlisted under the same great captain of salvation. He is in short a friend to universal toleration. His affections are not limited to the Christian community, to the household

household of faith alone, but extend to the Jew, the Mahometan, and the poor Indian, whose untutored mind sees God in clouds, and implores a deity behind a mountain. He prays for their conversion, and looks forward with joy to that æra, when the light of the gospel shall rise on the universal world, and the kingdoms of the earth shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and his Christ. The charitable man is signalized from the churlish and obdurate, by deeds of brotherly kindness, and tender compassion. He is rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate. If Providence has blessed him with riches, he considers himself as the steward of God, to dispense consolation to the needy. The poor and the wretched are the better for his prosperity. As a tree, whose wide spreading boughs afford shelter to plants of feebler growth, his liberal hand diffuses happiness to the miserable. The cottage of poverty is often visited by this friend of mankind; and the house of mourning is not unfrequented. So widely useful is this sweet temper of charity, that not only his dependents experience its happy effects, but they devolve imperceptibly on numbers whom he never saw. So the re-

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mote pastures derive fruitfulness from the meandering stream, as well as those which imbibe the first waters at the source. In short, the whole strain of his life is love, peace, and harmony.—And now, my brethren, I appeal to your impartial judgment—where, in the circle of intellectual nature, shall we find an object more worthy of admiration than this disinterested and truly Christian character? No wonder that it should attach the gratitude and affections of men to such a degree, that some would rush on certain death for the preservation of such a generous friend, such a tender sympathizing heart, such an heroic and noble-minded patriot. Scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.

We must confess it to the immortal honour of our holy religion, that it has carried the doctrine of universal love to the highest pitch, far beyond the utmost efforts of Greek or Roman philosophy. I could multiply quotations to this purpose from the New Testament, but it does not seem necessary. The Apostle to the Corinthians, however, has delineated this shining principle in a manner so just, so eloquent,

eloquent, and so affecting, that I cannot forbear to repeat it here; and I am sure you will esteem it no encroachment upon your patience. Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

From such a view it is evident, that should this admirable virtue operate, in its fullest extent, on every heart, we might soon perceive a rapid alteration in the face of things, a vast improvement in the happiness of mankind. But, on the contrary, if it had no existence at all upon this earth, a region, where the most discordant elements of nature meet in everlasting war, would be a preferable abode.

The last and most compleat qualification of the truly religious man is, to walk humbly with his God. The necessity of this injunction is so very clear, that, in a Christian assembly, I shall have the less occasion to be diffusive on
this

this latter head: Nor shall I detain you by a long chain of argument to prove that there is a God. The existence of an eternal cause, from which this beautiful structure of the universe is derived, must strike the intelligent mind with irresistible conviction. Nature through all her works proclaims the awful truth. This infinite and almighty Being must be loved and obeyed by his dependent creatures. There can be no virtue without piety. All the graces of morality, if the deity be left out of the scheme, are like so many mutilated statues, which want the majestic head to give them their chief importance and dignity. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. They, who aspire to the name of good without any regard to the approbation of God, are far, very far from deserving that exalted title. They are comparable to those imperfect artists, who content themselves with finishing some inferior part with scrupulous attention, but, in what constitutes the excellency of their performance, are miserably deficient.

Banish the sense of an over-ruling Providence from the human mind, and you rob it of the most substantial comforts.

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The expectation of God's approving smile is one of the greatest pleasures arising from virtuous deeds. There will be found, in the course of life, some particular seasons of adversity, when no reflexions can support us, but a confidence in the supreme Father of the world. The satisfaction which proceeds from moral actions may appear sufficient, when all is smooth and prosperous, but is not of itself adequate to sustain the trembling soul in the hour of misfortune, and on the bed of death. The fear of God is the most indissoluble tie to virtue. A mere regard to the applause of men, or to the intrinsic loveliness of morality, has seldom turned a single person from sensual pleasures to repentance; but the idea of an all-observing God, the great searcher of hearts, has reclaimed thousands in every age. Fear, however, must not be the governing principle. We must love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our mind, with all our soul, and with all our strength. This is the great commandment, from which all the duties of morality, justice, and benevolence will flow.

This

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This then is the sum of all the argument, and I may assert it with confidence, for it is agreeable to the gospel of Jesus Christ, that whoever guides his actions by this rule, will stand the fairest chance of being recompensed at the resurrection of the just.

But is it not a melancholy consideration, that when the practical system of our religion is so very clear, and its great objects easily understood, such an amazing variety of opinions, such a multitude of parties should prevail in the Christian world? Is it not really a lamentable reflexion, that men, in every period of time, have laboured more assiduously to unravel some deep mysterious point, of no consequence to their eternal salvation, and far above their understanding, or to make proselytes to some darling notion, the coinage of a distempered brain, than to practise the essential duties of religion, which the text enumerates, justice and mercy to their brethren, and humility to their God?

But it had been a circumstance fortunate to the peace of society, if religious disputes had
never

never advanced beyond speculation. But, alas; what scenes of horror have they not produced! Streams of blood have been shed in support of a particular tenet; the sword of fanatic fury has ravaged the earth; racks and tortures have been employed to extort confessions of faith. And even in this our day, when learning ought, in some degree, to have banished superstition, and a sound philosophy to have improved the mind, the spirit of persecution is not yet extinguished. How many sects and parties still remain among us! What enthusiasm and bigotry, yea, what rancour, yea, what uncharitable zeal, among the votaries of a peaceful religion!

O thou, the most amiable Religion, thou angel of serene and benignant aspect, at whose descent from above peace and good will among men was proclaimed to the world below, how hast thou lost thy original brightness! How art thou transformed by the wickedness of thy professors, from the fair source of harmony, into a cause of violent debate, and stern contention!

Return,

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Return, ye primitive ages, when Religion was pure as its all perfect Author! Return, auspicious ages, that all they, O God, who profess thy holy name, may agree in the truth of thy holy word, and join in one strict embrace of universal charity and godly love.

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S E R M O N

Remun. the primitive age, when Religion
was pure as its all perfect Author's Religion,
suspicious age, that all they, O God, who
praise thy holy name, may agree in the truth
of thy holy word in one that can
place of universal charity and only love.

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MARK viii. 36.

What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?

THE truths of the Christian Religion, it is certain, are not considered with that precision which their importance demands. If they were, their influence would appear more universally among the nations, that profess to believe in a crucified Saviour. But it is, in some respects, a singular misfortune, that the human mind is too much addicted to the love of variety, which makes it overlook the choicest blessings when long possessed. From this unhappy principle it follows, that because that book which records the life and doctrine of the son of God, while he lived on earth, is daily read, and the same

divine precepts are often heard by us, we are not so sensibly impressed with their awfulness and excellence; our fears are not sufficiently excited, nor our hopes awakened by its promises and denunciations.

These observations I apply to the passage before us. We have here the serious question asked: what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? And yet how apt are we to read, or hear it read, with the most trifling indifference,

Now it is not the conjecture of a philosopher, the eloquent flourish of an orator, or the dream of a poet. These we might peruse as an amusing tale to beguile a tedious moment; the sublimity of the sentiment might afford us pleasure, though not supported by any collateral proofs to convince the understanding. But here the case is otherwise. The voice of truth, speaking by Jesus Christ, proclaims aloud that we have a spirit within us, which is responsible to God for the actions done in the body, and which, if found guilty by the impartial discerners of hearts, not the riches

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riches of the world collected together shall rescue from the punishment apporportioned to its wickedness.

This is a plain and concise view of the subject; but we may treat it more at large by observing the following division: first, we will consider the certainty of a future state from the prospect of this defective world; then the eternity of future punishments; and, lastly, that it will profit a man nothing if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul.

The first point under consideration is, the certainty of a future state from a prospect of this defective world. No man I believe, let his prejudices be ever so deeply rooted and violent, will have the confidence to assert, that mankind is incapable of further improvement. A variety of imperfections in the present state of things is clearly discernible. The mind of man, notwithstanding the efforts of the purest Religion to improve it, is still a melancholy prey to the passions of the most odious kind. Impurity still pursues its brutal appetites; revenge still burns with furious hatred; fraud and insincerity still exercise their pernicious

arts; ambition still kindles the torch of discord; avarice, with wan cheek, still watches over the hoarded treasure; the sanctions of virtue are rudely violated; the admonitions of conscience are either hushed for a season, or fall on the heart of many, like a ball rebounding from a hard surface; and the light of the gospel is buried in the cloud of human vice.

The natural world affords not a less unpleasing view. The earth, which, before the fall, bestowed her productions for the subsistence of all living creatures, with a luxuriant abundance, will not now bring forth the food convenient for life, without incessant and laborious cultivation. We find it was justly said to Adam, cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; in the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread. What change and inconstancy likewise in the appearance of the sky, and the face of the seasons! Sometimes a profound stillness reigns over all the works of nature, and at other times the elements are in universal commotion; sometimes a drought prevails, and the fields, which looked so fresh before, resemble an arid and sandy wilderness; sometimes

times we experience the piercing cold, and at other times are scorched by the parching heat. The very air which we breathe is not always free from noxious principles. Charged with pestilential vapours, each particle we imbibe is often pregnant with disease and death. From the elementary ascend we to the rational world; and with what terror shall we contemplate the long catalogue of those evils, of pain, of sickness, and of sorrows, which undermine the human body; and death, the dire fiend in the rear, closing up the melancholy account.

Is this too strong a representation? No, I have but sketched the outlines of the picture; the colours might be applied with a more masterly hand. Is it to be credited then, is it a supposition reconcileable with the attributes of God, that such an imperfect part of the system can long have a place among the works of his almighty wisdom? Our reason decries the improbability. When the causes which gave it being are answered, the abolition of the world, this vast extended empire of death, will ensue. All the objects around us attest

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this great article; and we have no other methods of drawing conclusions, without the assistance of divine revelation, than from present appearances. What can we reason but from what we know? The scriptures, however, have not left us to explore our way in darkness, but have thrown sufficient light on this interesting subject. As the days of Noah were, says our Saviour, so shall the coming of the son of man be. And again, the son of man shall come in his glory. And St. Peter, in the third chapter of his second general epistle, but the heavens and the earth which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment, and perdition of ungodly men. Now I see nothing in all this inconsistent with the wisdom of an infinite being. For as the world, created at first in the utmost purity with regard to morals, and in the most faultless manner with regard to the laws of nature, has unhappily degenerated; it is probable that it will, nay, it is requisite, that it should be destroyed to make way for a new heaven, and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Thus, in the works of men a beautiful and
stately

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stately palace is often erected on the ruins of a decayed mansion.

A new state of things thus established, the seeming irregularities of the present scene will be corrected. The perseverance of virtue will receive an exceeding weight of glory, and unrepented vice shall feel the punishment due to its enormities. And this brings us to the consideration of our second point; the eternity of future punishments.

This is lately grown a popular topic of argument. Such a notion, it is said, first started by enthusiasm and unrelenting bigotry, militates against every idea of mercy and goodness, which the supreme being is supposed to exercise in the most unlimited manner. It is absurd to suppose that a virtue or wickedness, of fifty or sixty years, should be rewarded with eternal happiness, or punished with everlasting misery*. Such was the opinion of a leader of the infidel tribe; but, as his hatred to the religion of Jesus was avowed and implacable, we are quick to suspect deceit and fraud in

* Lord Bolingbroke, vol. 5, p. 493.

such

such an enemy. This notion, however, has been revived by many whose turn of thought is liberal; who are friends to Christianity, and to the interests of human nature. But it is difficult to comprehend in what manner the justice, or the mercy of God, is impeached by the decree of eternal punishments. Man is originally placed on the theatre of life as a probationer for heaven. The pursuits of vice and virtue are at his option; his choice is free and unconstrained. The propensities, which lead him to sin, are far from being irresistible; and the motives which lead him to goodness, are various and attractive. His natural reason, however he may err from his own principles, loaths the deformity of vice, and admires the awful charms of virtue. Vice, while he bends to its dominion, as the slave crouches to the tyrant whom he hates, is abhorred, and virtue is preferred by every idea of his mind, by every feeling of his heart. Let him meet, with a bold and steady opposition, the first encroachments of his evil passions, and he will soon rise to the excellence of the moral qualities, the proper employment of intellectual creatures; as floating bodies, when freed from the incumbent

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bent weight, which pressed them to the lowest depth of the water, shoot up to the surface, their natural station, with great velocity. Thus man, from his own internal constitution, from the light of reason alone, may escape the dangerous shoals of vice, and steer into the quiet and secure haven of virtue. But this is not all; the wisdom and goodness of God has provided a divine revelation; a gospel which acquaints us with his holy will; which lays down the most exact and perfect rules for our moral conduct; which subdues our haughty and imperious passions; and which (it may be said, if it ever can be said of any Religion) polishes, and softens our manners, and tames the fierce barbarians into men; and which, in short, assures us of everlasting rewards and punishments, in consequence of our virtues and our vices, as the most prevailing motive which can be proposed to reflexion. Thus instructed, thus fortified by a natural and divine revelation against the temptations which surround us here, and are inseparable from a state of probation, we have no cause to flatter ourselves, to smooth over our darling sins, by vainly supposing, that future punishments are limited to
a certain

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a certain period, and not extended through the ages of eternity. This proceeding on the part of God is just and impartial. We know, the meanest of us knows the conditions; and therefore, if we do not perform them, when it is plainly in the capacity, and at the option of every individual, will be thought a hard dealing, on the side of Omnipotence, to exclude us without redemption, and without hope, from the possession of bliss and glory?

But, it is argued, the state of trial is too disproportioned to that eternity which is to succeed. This is a weak position; for were the life of man prolonged to three, to five, yea, to nine centuries, the world would probably be more corrupt, and iniquity more abundant. The day of death at so great a distance, its terrors would become less formidable, and men would drop into an incautious carelessness of futurity. And this would open a passage for the introduction of every enormity, and every abomination, which can stain the history of mankind. The vast portion of time, which the Antediluvians, or men before the flood, were allowed to occupy, was the
the

the probable origin of that extensive profligacy which contaminated those ages, and caused that tremendous deluge which swept away the universal race of men. The shortness of the present life is then a wise allotment, from which we ought to draw the most instructive lessons, and be taught to employ so narrow a space to best advantage. Life is long enough for the display of piety and virtue; life is long enough to live and to die well.

No fair conclusion, then, can be made from the circumscribed limits of our temporal existence, that the eternity of future punishments is fabulous and misrepresented. O! it is a soft and oily doctrine to the gay, the voluptuous, the sensual, and the worldly! But if the belief of it should once become general, the sad effects which must be produced on the good order and happiness of human kind, would soon be felt and lamented. There are some men who possess a soul, grown by long habit so naked of every honourable principle, of every generous and benevolent sentiment, of every regard and esteem for virtue, that could the improbability of everlasting torments be made

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made apparent to their understanding, they would trample on every divine and human law to gratify their inordinate affections. The hope of surviving after a certain period passed in misery, and of being admitted, as if they had never sinned, to share the joys of immortality with God above, would diminish their fears, and alleviate the anxieties of conscience. But when it is denounced, that the forlorn and miserable state of the wicked shall never be altered, that when a thousand years are expired in the extreme of woe, a thousand shall succeed; and to this thousand millions, and millions of ages; and so on through an infinite series of calculations—at the dreadful thought, vice shrinks appalled; murder drops the dagger from his nerveless arm; lust checks his brutal rage; intemperance is harrassed by remorse amid the circling bowl; and villainy trembles through his inmost frame.

Thus in every respect the decree of eternal punishments is a wise decree of providence. The scriptures, indeed, do not give the least authority for a contrary inference. Christ concludes his description of the last judgment with

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with this solemn declaration: and these (the wicked) shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous unto life eternal. Now what other construction can be put upon the words *everlasting* and *eternal*, than an unceasing duration? The Father of the faithful thus informs the unfortunate Dives: and besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulph; so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us that would come from thence. This great gulph, which he speaks of, is allegorical, and signifies an irrevocable doom, an unalterable situation.

O consider this all ye that forget God! While yet the breath of life continues to animate your bodies, and the powers of reason are yet undecayed, consider futurity and be wise! Life and death, blessing and cursing, are set before you; therefore chuse life.

But thirdly, from the idea of those unchanging sorrows which await the condemned sinner, the question is pertinent and natural: what

what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?

Worldly happiness (I do not mean that happiness which is founded on piety and moral actions) worldly happiness is a false glare, a shooting meteor, that blazes, and is passed away. The man who searches after it is generally disappointed in the event; and should he reach the summit of his desires, the possession is uncertain and precarious. The multitude pursue it through a thousand forms, and all return from the fruitless journey unsuccessful and complaining. In the alacrity of youthful spirits, each paints to himself an airy phantom of bliss, which he follows for many a tedious year; till the evening of life approaches, and the fond delusion melts from his void embrace. Such is the vanity of that dream, which mankind have dignified with the appellation of happiness, and on whose altar they are willing to immolate their dearest concerns, their hopes of heaven. But the riches of the world, and the world itself, which is composed of perishable matter, are of no value in comparison of the immortal soul. Nothing will make amends

mends for its loss. The glitter of polite accomplishments shall fade, the voice of eloquence shall die away, the schemes of human wisdom shall be overthrown, the learning of the philosopher shall vanish, the laws of the statesman, and the deeds of the warrior shall be at last forgotten. Let a man be adorned with every qualification; let him boast the wisdom of Solomon, and speak of trees from the cedar on Lebanon, even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall; let him enjoy the strength of Samson, and the prudence of Gideon; let him in this sense gain the whole world; that is, every endowment, art, and science in the world: or, let him gain the whole world in the literal meaning; let him reign despotic lord over all the regions of the habitable globe; let his nod determine the fate of empires, let armies watch his slumbers; let millions wear out life in the bowels of the earth to procure him gold, or labour in the fields to support his luxury, or toil at the loom, that he may be cloathed in purple and fine linen—yet would this exalted station profit him nothing, if in the mean time he should lose his own soul. When death shall have dropped the curtain, if he be found deficient

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in the religious character at that tribunal where the wealthiest must appear on the same equality with the meanest slave, all this power and this shew of glory will not annul the determinations of the supremely wise and almighty; will not mitigate the severity, nor shorten the duration of eternal punishment.

Are these affecting truths, my brethren? Do they touch your souls, and rouse them from that soft dream of security, by which, alas! too many of you are ensnared and beguiled out of salvation? Are your footsteps treading on the narrow path which leads to life, or on that broad way which declines to the valley of death and perdition? Do you live here below by faith and virtue, or by infidelity and sense? Ah! although from that inferior station which is allotted you by Providence, you have no probability of acquiring dominion; yet, according to your several ranks, are not your thoughts and affections as much attracted and engrossed by terrestrial objects, as the man above described, who gained the whole world, and (oh, the sad reversion!) lost his own soul? does not the world, the deceitful world employ all your care, and exclude from your remembrance

remembrance Christ and his gospel? Do not some of you add house to house, and land to land; as if the possession of these things were eternal? Do not others serve Mammon, without considering the Lord, or regarding the operations of his hand? Do not others dedicate their moments to debauchery and the love of strong drink; as if Heaven were a sensual region, and the best means to prepare them for it were a life of voluptuousness? Do not some, sicklied over by the pale cast of envy, delight to speak evil of others; as if charity and benevolence did not make a part of the Christian scheme? Brethren, these things ought not to be so. The gratification of these favourite depravities will not atone for the loss of your souls; nor will it avail you to plead—Lord, I was a man in great authority; or I laboured to acquire riches; or my life was a pleasurable scene; or my vein of irony, and my talent at ridiculing the faults of others, were admired and applauded. These endowments, because misapplied, will enhance your condemnation.

Lay not up for yourselves, then, treasures upon earth, which cannot redeem your souls,

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but

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but seek the never-failing treasures of the heavenly kingdom. When the gospel invites you to the banquet, the celestial banquet, where you may come and taste how good the Lord is, do not imitate the conduct of those imprudent guests, who made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise. But remember the words of the blessed Jesus, Martha, Martha, thou art careful about many things, but one thing is needful. These expressions, however, do not imply that we should abstain from every intercourse with the world, and always live on meditation and prayer, like hermits in solitude; much less that we should neglect our respective professions. Many run to this opposite extreme, and it is criminal. Religion, and the world properly used, are not incompatible. Far from it; Religion is best displayed in social life. The virtues of sincerity, justice, and benevolence, flourish there. Religion is the nurse of all these graces, and promotes them, as the root nourishes the tree through all its fibres and branches.

But to conclude. This subject, I flatter myself, will be deemed of sufficient importance

S E R M O N II. 37

tance to engage your most serious attention. And if my manner of treating it has not made that impression which I wished and aimed at, charge it not to my want of zeal, but of abilities. 'God of his infinite mercy grant, that you may grow in grace; that you may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works; that under the influence of Religion you may bloom, like flowers dressed by the hand of the skilful artist in a well-planted garden. And that when the storm of death shall blast your tender leaves, ye may be transplanted to adorn the courts of the living God. Amen.

...to engage your most serious attention.
And if my manner of teaching it has not made
that impression which I wished and aimed at,
change it not to my want of zeal, but of skill.
Thus, "God of his infinite mercy grant, that
you may grow in grace," that you may be
perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good
works, that influence of Religion
you may bloom like flowers dressed by the
hand of the skillful artist in a well-planted
garden. And that when the form of death
shall pluck your tender leaves, ye may be
transplanted to adorn the courts of the living
God. Amen.

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S E R M O N III.

I ST. PETER ii. 2.

As new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.

THE chapter begins; wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies and envies, and all evil speakings—our hearts thus purified from the stain of these corrupt passions, will become free and open to receive the genial influence of the holy word; which will improve it in grace, just as milk, the most innocent of foods, cherishes the new-born babe with its nutritive qualities. This allusion is, indeed, full of exquisite beauty, and sweetly expressive of that gentle spirit, which breathes through the gospel; a spirit of general love; a spirit which employs no violence to extend Religion,

but insinuates itself by the mildest though most convincing arguments.

The Apostle therefore recommends an early acquaintance with this heavenly spirit. As the babe, led by instinctive nature, applies for nourishment to the maternal breast; in the like manner, regenerate from every carnal propensity, and risen from the death of sin unto the life of righteousness, we ought to desire the sincere milk of the word, that we may grow thereby.

That we may grow thereby. From this mode of expression it distinctly follows, that the life of holiness is progressive, and not formed in the soul by any sudden revolution. Man is not made a perfect Christian all at once in a moment of time; close application to goodness and virtue must fix those habits in the soul before they can acquire any stability. Frequent perusal of the scriptures, repeated meditations on the Christian scheme, on the proofs which support the veracity of its divine original, the excellence of its morality, the irreproachable character, the benevolent disposition of Christ, his miracles which ex-

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ceeded all human power, his own resurrection from the dead, and his triumphant ascension at the right hand of God; such studies often reiterated will produce conviction, and conviction is the parent of faith, which displays itself in active practice, and steady obedience. Thus by degrees Religion will obtain the ascendancy; and having rooted out each prurient weed of vice, and tinsel decoration of folly, the good seed will grow abundantly, and expand into a rich and copious harvest. This is the seed which falls into good ground, and brings forth fruit, some an hundred-fold, some sixty-fold, some thirty-fold, in proportion to the excellence of the soil.

We live at a period of time, when human science has arrived to a degree of perfection unknown to former ages. Philosophy, by a gradual and painful investigation, has made astonishing discoveries in the works of nature. The politer parts of learning are daily cultivated with assiduous and successful efforts. The useful and ornamental arts are continually improving. Men are not discouraged at the pains which attend laborious researches, nor startled at the difficulties which are scattered
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in all the paths of learning. Animated by the love of riches or of glory, they strain every nerve, and employ every talent to gain a name, or build a fortune by a superior display of genius. But amidst all this eager thirst after knowledge, there is one science, and that infinitely the most important, the science of acting up to our Christian profession, the science of living well, which is miserably neglected. As a plant, whose juices are salutary to life, is thrown aside, and suffered to wither, because its healing virtues are not tasted. Volumes of commentaries, and a library of sermons, containing elegant speculations on piety, and just observations on moral goodness have been produced;—but, alas! here is the utmost bound of Religion. We lightly peruse them with our eyes on the paper, but few of us transcribe them on the tablets of our hearts. The generality of men have just heard that there is a gospel, a system of grace; or perhaps have gained a superficial knowledge of that great revelation; but few, very few have felt its energetic and vivid operations; few have felt that word of God, which is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing
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asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. The Religion of this age is merely speculative. Men, as the Levite in the story of the unfortunate traveller, come and look at the gospel, and pass by on the other side.

Here it may be said, and it has been said, that beneficence to the poor, to cloathe the naked, and to feed the hungry, is one of the most essential distinctions, is insisted upon with peculiar emphasis as the test of a real Christian. And if so, the Religion of the present age can with no shadow of reason be called speculative, when the various monuments of public charities, actually existing, are considered. This is rather a specious than a convincing argument. Wantonly to suppose that charitable deeds have their original in unworthy motives, were a great injustice, and much unbecoming the philanthropic character. But the folly and weakness of our nature is not unknown: it too often happens that ostentatious vanity is the swelling parent of this branch of Christian benevolence. Admit, however, the principle from which it is derived

ved to be pure and disinterested, will deference to one particular precept, atone for the contempt of others, and perhaps for a life of vice and dissipation?

Thus we return to the former observation, that Religion, as it is exhibited in our day, is more an ærial shadow than a solid substance, more ceremonial than practical, having the form of godliness, but denying the power thereof. Go to any congregation, met together to adore, and elevate the hymn of praise and gratitude to their almighty and beneficent Creator. Where is that humility, which becomes mortal creatures, united to implore the mercy of their God; where is that earnestness in prayer, that fervour of piety which disengages the soul from its gross attachments to the body, and lifts it on seraphic wings to heaven? Not to be found, alas! in these assemblies. A light fantastic form of unconcern, or a frigid stupidity, take place of a holy, growing, and devotional spirit.

Hence, it is clearly evident, the great truths of Religion have not been properly studied and treasured up in the memory. Men sit
down

down contented with a few broken interrupted acts of devotion, and take no farther pains, use no other endeavours to become perfect and uniform in goodness and virtue. In the state of nature all things are matured by time and cultivation. The earth will not bring forth spontaneous harvests, nor the flower be dressed out all at once in its colours of richest dye: the infant grows up to manhood by a slow progression, and the mind is ripened by application. The case is exactly similar in the state of grace. The causes, for which they were exerted, no longer existing, the instantaneous inspirations of the Holy Ghost have terminated in the apostolic ages. The mad presumption of enthusiasm alone can expect a sudden irradiation of the spirit. God never departs, but upon extraordinary occasions, from the established laws of nature. Why then should he perform a miracle, by working a transformation immediately compleat in the soul of a sinner? This nor his justice, nor his mercy, nor any of his attributes demand. By the declaration of his will, and the publication of his everlasting grace in the gospel of his son Jesus Christ, we are indulged with all necessary information, and blessed with every comfort

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fort of hope. The task now rests upon us of improving these advantages, by labouring to excel in holiness.

But here lies the grand delusion. Men, as they themselves fondly imagine, may be good Christians at any age, time, or season. Vice and virtue, they vainly suppose, have not such permanent foundations in the heart, but they may easily be eradicated. Their darling sins, as they absurdly conceive, may be put off with the same facility as their dress. These are great mistakes which lull the soul into a fatal security. The mind, having indulged too long a favourite inclination, is not soon diverted from the pursuit. The aged tree is hardly pliant to another form. Thus persuaded with the false idea of being able to amend at pleasure, we may proceed in the gratification of our beloved lusts, with the same imprudent confidence as the Egyptians rushing through the red sea; till, as they were overwhelmed by the waters, bursting in deluge over their heads, we also perish before we have time to put our virtuous resolutions in practice.

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The reason why Christianity acquires so circumscribed a power in the human breast, may be traced to other sources. God would have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth. But many defeat his merciful intentions by a wretched indifference to all Religion. They neither strive to obtain a knowledge, nor wish to believe its solemn doctrines. The gospel trumpet-tongued pleads their own happiness, and places eternity before them—Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. But as the body, stretched in the grave, has so lost every organ of sense and perception, that not even the most ravishing and melodious sounds of music, nor the sweetest periods of the most flowing eloquence can rouse it from the deep slumber of death; in the same manner, their cold unfruitful heart is untouched by the persuasive voice of Religion.

There are other reasons why men do not grow in grace. Like Demas they have loved the present world, and centered all their attachments to the objects of time and sense; as rays of light contracted to one narrow point.

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The pleasures of this life, which on the experiment are always found imperfect, they pursue with mad eagerness; shifting the scene from one form of vanity to another, like children following a bubble; which, floating in the air, appears to their judgment like a substance, but on the touch is discovered to be wind and emptiness. Thus, ever contemplating such light airy phantoms, they become so wedded to trifles, as to lose every kind of relish for the solid and elevated objects of Religion. How can such persons make the slightest advance in holiness, whose thoughts, instead of aspiring, as they ought, to heaven, are chained down to earth? How can they grow by the sincere milk of Christianity, who have not yet tasted, nor endeavoured to taste its prolific sweetness?

The business of their various professions is pleaded by others for their habitual neglect of Religion. Their extensive occupations, and domestic cares are alledged. Presumptuous and unthinking men! say rather, the world is the god of your idolatry; say, that you prefer temporal advantages to the sublime promises

promises of Christ; say, that your soul degraded from its divine nature has no wish beyond this mortal life; and holds visible enjoyments in greater esteem than the unseen glories of the heavenly kingdom. And yet the great apostle of the Gentiles, who was transported in a vision to the third heaven, tells you, that eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive the things which God hath prepared for those that love him. But these enticing declarations are lost upon you, as the words of our Saviour were lost upon the unbelieving Sadduces. The joys of Heaven are too refined to have any effect on such darkened understandings. The beams of the sun are best reflected when they fall upon a polished body.

There are others who rest their Religion in plausible forms, while their hearts all the time are not enlivened by its genuine fires. They satisfy their conscience with the appearance of piety; mere specious shew, void of eternal excellence—as the artificer gives a beautiful gloss to the outward part of the marble, while it remains untouched within, and rough as before.

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Some again are discouraged from making a proficiency in religious knowledge by the difficulties which, they suppose, must be encountered. And, without question, the path on the first entrance will appear steep and rugged; so many self-denials necessary, so many lusts and appetites to subdue, so many vices to extinguish! But the farther he advances, the more pleasing will the journey seem to the delighted traveller. In exchange for the dreary wilderness of sin which he leaves behind, enamelled meads, beautiful lawns, and cultivated fields, will open to his enchanted view. So truly is it said of Religion, her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.

Having thus touched upon the causes which prevent many from making any great acquisition in grace, we cannot better employ the remaining part of our discourse, than by tracing the character of the perfect scholar in that branch of science.

He enters in the school of life with the same disadvantages as the rest of his fellow-creatures;

creatures; the seeds of passion are equally sown in his heart; the same appetites, the same follies, and the same vices plead hard for gratification; the same love of the world engrosses at first his affections. But Christianity, to which he applies with unremitted ardour, gradually wears off the force of these pernicious habits. He is there acquainted, that man, so proud and conceited of his own dignity, is a fallen creature, humbled by his transgression to the dust of the earth; that death and sin reigned absolute over all living nature; that mankind was sunk in so gross a barbarity, that the knowledge of the true God was obliterated among them; that they are instructed, comforted, redeemed by Jesus Christ, who descended from his throne of glory in a human form, delivered a scheme of doctrine the most conducive to their felicity while they lived, and to prepare them for the perfect enjoyment of that eternal state which it proposes as the reward of obedience; and finally gave up his innocent life to atone for the sins of all.

The spirit of gratitude is awakened by the recollection of such generous, such unmerited

kindness to frail mortality ; and he forms the immediate resolution to ingratiate himself in the love of so gracious a master, by forbearing the indulgence of every criminal inclination ; and to become a possessor of his glorious promises by deserving them. Violent are his struggles, and wily the arguments of that tempter the world ; the kingdoms and their glory are offered, if he would again fall down and worship it. But the promises of the world he knows are deceitful, its joys are momentary, its afflictions intolerable ; but the promises of the spirit are secure, its comforts permanent, its sorrows wholesome. The precepts of the gospel rooted in his heart, and the Holy Ghost, the comforter, co-operating the compleat triumph over passion is obtained ; and the life of holiness from that moment dawning on the enlightened mind, is like the great fountain of heat in the firmament, which keeps on a regular increasing progress, till it has reached the noon of day, while the fogs and misty vapours, which had obscured its morning beams, are melted or absorbed in the superior blaze of light. Or, as the Proverbs of Solomon better express it, the path of

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of the just is as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

His soul may be called a region inhabited by all the virtues; Humility, the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which before God is of great price; Charity, that delights in love, and shall remain when Faith and Hope shall be swallowed up in fruition; Mercy, kind, and tender-hearted; Purity, innocent in thought, and unpolluted by deed. Thus finished upon the true gospel plan, this faithful servant of Jesus advances more and more in the line of Christian perfection; the pleasures of Religion are more and more grateful to his mind: he experiences a satisfaction which nothing can take away; the peace of God, which passes all understanding, gilds the evening of his days; and ready to participate that fulness of joy, which faith had before presented to his enraptured ideas, he commends his spirit with calm resignation, and a lively hope, into the hands of his merciful Father.

Be it then, my brethren, our early care, and the first object of our desires, to study the

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great truths of revelation, and to realize them in the conduct of our remaining lives. You, chiefly, O parents! whose tenderness for your children is extended beyond the grave, and ardently wishes to render them happy in their temporal and future concerns—mould them early to Religion; train them up in the way of the Lord, and when they are old they shall not depart from it.

You, my young friends, I address on this occasion with particular satisfaction; you who have displayed your zeal for divine knowledge, by repairing diligently to hear our private expositions of the Holy Bible*. Your deep attention, and the seriousness of your deportment claim the warmest encomiums, and reflect honour on the parents, who have thus bred you to virtue. As yet unschooled in the corruptions of the world, a mind yet innocent and docile, you can best imbibe the seed of grace and instruction; which, if nurtured with assiduous hand, will bloom through all your future days, and bring the fruits mature

* Alluding to a lecture on the Scripture, delivered twice a week to the younger part of the Author's parishioners.

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of piety, and well ordered affections. Thrice happy preacher ! could his labours be rewarded with the delicious reflexion of having contributed to the salvation of one fellow-creature ! Thrice happier still, would all who hear him now reduce to practice what he has offered to their consideration, and be meet partakers of that rest which remaineth unto the people of God ! Amen.

of God! Amen.

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S E R M O N IV.

PSALM ciii. 2.

*Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all
his benefits.*

THIS psalm is written with uncommon beauty, and breathes a fervent strain of uninterrupted gratitude.

The sacred prophet, inspired with the warmest sentiments of God's unmerited goodness to his creatures, and his various mercies to himself in particular, pours forth an affectionate hymn of praise and thanksgiving. He first of all addresses himself to the soul, as the immortal, and most perfect part of the creation, as the spirit that descends from heaven; and next to all that is within him, to every thing which teems with life and motion. Praise the Lord,
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O my soul, says the divine poet, and all that is within me praise his holy name. He then, in the most harmonious and pathetic expressions, enumerates the tenderness, the mercies of his almighty Father; who forgiveth all thy sin, and healeth all thy infirmities; who saveth thy life from destruction, and crowneth thee with mercy and loving-kindness; who satisfieth thy life with good things.

But not contented with the small portion of thanksgiving which the terrestrial creation is able to bestow, he calls on a superior class of beings; the angels of the Lord that excel in strength, that fulfil his commandments, and hearken unto the voice of his words; he calls on those immortal spirits, that minister continually before God, to join in the universal song, and pay their tribute of gratitude to that benevolent Parent, in whom they live and move, and have their being.

I shall attempt, in the simple language of unadorned truth, to inspire you with sentiments of gratitude towards the most perfect and beneficent of beings. And suffer me to indulge the pleasing hope, that your future conduct,

duct, regulated by the dictates of Religion, and a life devoted to the practice of every virtue which is fair and amiable, will amply reward my weak endeavours. My wishes for your welfare will then be gratified, and I shall know with inexpressible pleasure, that my labour is not in vain in the Lord.

The benefits which lay the best-founded claim to gratitude, and make the most lasting impressions on a generous temper, are those, which we confer in such circumstances and seasons when no views of recompense can be entertained with any probable reason. He displays the most benevolent nature, who directs every sentiment, every action to the welfare of his fellow creatures; who is charitable for the sake of charity; without a wish for any other advantage than that pure contentment which the pleasing reflection of having relieved the miserable never fails to produce. This is that real goodness, that disinterested love of mankind, which, like a fruitful stream, flows on without interruption to water the vallies and the pastures, but never can return to its parent fountain. Now appeal to the conscious

scious breast—do we not feel the most endearing affections for such a character? Is it not the best system of conduct we can adopt; the sweetest source of pleasure to ourselves, and of happiness to our inferior brethren? Does it not challenge their admiration, and their love?

If such a disposition be so graceful and ornamental to humanity, with what wonder and gratitude must we behold it dignified and exalted in the everlasting Lord, whose goodness is not bounded by time, but extensive as the wide range of eternity?

Wide indeed is the difference, and presumptuous would be the comparison between the benevolence of the sacred Father, and that of mortal man, who, strictly speaking, is placed in a state of dependence on his fellow-creatures, and cannot obtain all the conveniences of life in his single capacity. The most splendid station is supported by the constant labour of the poor mechanic, who in return demands that consolation and charity from the more opulent which repays his toil, and alleviates his necessities. So nicely connected

nected is every link in the great chain of society, that none of us liveth to himself.

And after all our boasted prerogatives of rank, splendor, and riches, the meanest individual, who desires to be fed with the crumbs which fall from our tables, is composed of the same materials, feels the same appetites, hath the same distinguishing reason with ourselves, though perhaps less adorned by the polish of education. And last of all, the dark and dismal tomb will bury all our pomp; our bodies must equally moulder into dust, and the worm will feast without distinction on our cold remains. If then we consider the argument in this light, our needy brethren, whom Providence, for the wisest purposes, has placed in the lower stations, may plead some right to our benevolence and charity.

But what motives direct the King of kings to such continual acts of mercy and loving-kindness to his creatures? Do they found their claim to his benefice on any principles of merit? Have they contributed to establish his kingdom, and extend his dominion over the earth? Or, if the children of men had never
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been, would that have diminished his glory, and sullied the radiance of his majesty? Would that have made his glorious name the less revered? Alas! the world we inhabit is of small account, when compared to those larger and more splendid orbs which shine around us; and the race of men is weak and imperfect in the sight of those immortal and refined spirits, who continue in the presence of God for everlasting ages.

We just flutter a few years on this little stage of existence, then vanish like the shadows of the night, and our place is found no more. As we are, then, by nature so insignificant, whence is derived the loving-kindness of our gracious Lord? Whence, but from that inexhaustible goodness, which is the distinguishing character of the Divinity, who delights to bless, and rejoices to see us flourishing and happy. The Lord, says the sweet Psalmist of Israel, is full of compassion and mercy, long-suffering, and of great goodness. For look how high the heaven is in comparison of the earth, so great is his mercy also towards them that fear him. Then he gives you the plain and excellent reason; for he knoweth where-
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of we are made, he remembereth that we are but dust.

This sovereign benefactor then hath denied us nothing which might smoothe our passage down the stream of life. Each advantage, each pleasure, each consolation we enjoy is a fresh instance of his unconfined and impartial benevolence.

A variety of motives concur in exciting in us the deepest veneration, and warmest love for our God. Wide and extensive objects of praise and gratitude present themselves to the eyes of the pious observer. It is my purpose this day to contemplate the loving-kindness of heaven in some of the most important points of view.

Where were you, let me ask, when the foundations of the earth were laid, when the morning stars sung together, and the sons of God shouted for joy? Where were you, when this universe, this goodly frame of order and of harmony was first created? You were as the scattered atom, as the dust before the wind. How then comes it to pass that you are so fearfully and wonderfully made? Who gave

gave you this stately being? Who informed it with the spirit of life, ennobled it with reason, and bestowed that immaterial soul, which shall never die; but when released from her bodily prison, shall reascend to her native heaven? It was the Omnipotent Creator, the author of all love and happiness: the Lord is his name.

It follows then to enquire, into what world you were thus fashioned, introduced? Was it in a dreary wilderness, without society, without cultivation? Was it in a savage climate, where the sun of righteousness has never dawned, but the gloom of ignorance sits dark and heavy; where the wild inhabitant lives by plunder and devastation, by war and violence? No,—you came into a polished and civilized country, where religion is pure and undefiled, superstition is fled, and the virtues, which adorn the human character, flourish and abound. Here then is a subject of gratitude, which ought never to cease, but with the last breath of existence.

But still to animate your gratitude, and inspire the song of religious praise, look round the habitable world; consider the dispositions
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of nature; observe the curious productions of vegetable life, which are so admirably contrived to relieve your wants, and satisfy your craving appetites. For you the seasons roll in sweet variety; the genial rains descend to feed the earth; and the fields are invested with fruitfulness and beauty. The bounteous Lord provides for the earth; he waters her furrows; he sends rain into the little vallies thereof; he maketh it soft with the drops of rain, and blesteth her encrease. He crowns the year with his goodness, and his clouds drop fatness. They drop upon the dwellings of the wilderness, and the little hills rejoice on every side. The vallies also stand so thick with corn, that they laugh and sing. The earth, and the air are stocked with living creatures innumerable, and the sea is peopled with animals of various and exquisite construction, to supply your wants, and minister to your luxury. In fine, whatever contributes to nourish life, and support the human frame; whatever is pleasant to the taste or eye; whatever the richest imagination can conceive, is amply provided by the merciful Father of the universe. Indeed the whole earth is the theatre of his beneficence. His goodness is unchangeably

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extended through the creation, from the rational to the brutal, and from the brutal to the vegetable world. But man is the favourite object on whom it is bestowed with so much profusion. O fortunate indeed, beyond all description fortunate, if he rightly knew his own happiness!

Consider too the dispositions for happiness, which the benevolent Lord has implanted in our constitution. Consider the infinite pleasures of the mental perceptions, the unutterable delights which attend the social intercourse of mankind. Consider how strong, and engaging, are the ties of nature; how dear, inexpressibly dear, are the tender appellations of parent, children, brother, and sister; and how sweet are the names of friends and relatives. These are all the effects of his supreme goodness, who is still watchful to protect us, and still anxious for our interest and advantage.

Sometimes, indeed, the cup of life is mixed with bitter ingredients. The evils, which march in the train of sin and death, misfortunes, diseases and poverty, full often fall on the devoted head of poor mortal creatures.

S E R M O N IV. 67

tures. Yet if the Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon us, the gloom is vanished, the scene brightens, and again we catch the reviving prospect of happiness. There are a thousand blessings to lessen the sorrows, a thousand comforts to balance the calamities of life. Heaviness may last for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.

But if we look beyond this world, how much more stupendous and immense will the debt of gratitude appear, when it is considered, that the Almighty Father sent his well-beloved son to bring life and immortality to light, to suffer for our iniquities, to free us from the bondage of sin, and seal us unto the day of redemption.

O glorious proof of exceeding love! O transcendent goodness, which will not cease in the grave, but be extended through the boundless space of infinite duration! Death may destroy this perishable body; but we shall be translated to happier regions, where life and bliss unfading shall be our portion. The faculties of the soul shall be enobled and refined; and we shall associate with the righteous

of all ages, and with those benevolent spirits, who rejoiced in our prosperity while we lived on earth. These shall be the companions of our happiness, and teach us the song of the lamb, and the everlasting praises of our God.

In that day we shall be witnesses of the magnificence and grandeur of the universal King. Our thoughts will wander in eternity. The understanding more enlarged, and suited to its illustrious rank, will comprehend, with unceasing astonishment, that infinite goodness and condescension, which gives us a rational being; made ample provision for the support of our earthly pilgrimage; and at last introduced us to a scene of joys unutterable, such as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive.

What elevation of sentiment, what sublimity of expression! Gracious heaven! What is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou visitest him? Thou madest him lower than the angels, to crown him with glory and worship. Thou makest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands,

S E R M O N IV. 69

hands, and thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. O Lord, our governor, how excellent is thy name in all the world!

Learn then, my Fellow-Christians, learn to cultivate that veneration which you owe to the great and good God. Learn to practise those virtues which are the most lovely in his eyes, and the most essential exercise of your souls. Learn to emulate one another—not in the splendor of festivities and entertainments, not in the fantastic decorations of dress and beauty, not in the dance and song, or other external and fading accomplishments; but in the graces which become the Christian name; but in humility; but in brotherly kindness one towards another. Thank your great benefactor by a frugal and temperate use of his gifts. Instil the divine precepts of Religion in the pliant minds of your children; bid them remember that the food, the raiment, and the light which they enjoy, are so many instances of the tender regard of their heavenly Father. Rise with a spirit of devotion to your daily employments; and when streams of delight and happiness flow in upon you from every side, be not unmindful of that God who giveth

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you all things richly to enjoy. Thus shall your gratitude continue warm and undiminished through every period of your existence, and produce the fruits of piety and well-regulated affections. Then shall the earth bring forth her encrease, and God, even our own God, shall give us his blessing. Then shall mercy and truth meet together; righteousness and peace shall kiss each other. Truth shall flourish out of the earth, and righteousness shall look down from heaven.

SERMON

S E R M O N V.

MARK X. 26.

And they were astonished beyond measure, saying among themselves, who then can be saved?

THE following circumstance gave birth to the question before us. Christ was addressed by a certain young man with this proposition: good master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? The Saviour recapitulated to him the precepts of the moral law. The youth replied, master, all these have I observed from my youth. This frank confession, the truth of which appears not to have been doubted, and this amiable simplicity of manners, attracted the love of Jesus; and he said unto him, one thing thou lackest; go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and

come, take up the cross and follow me. This was a rigid injunction to a man, who before had lived in affluence and splendor: his soul was touched with sadness, and he departed sorrowful at the word, for we read he had great possessions. The following reflections were made by Jesus on this event: children, how hard it is for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. This declaration excited the astonishment of his disciples; and if the terms were so extremely severe, they could not descry a possibility of salvation—who then can be saved?

This question involves a subject of the utmost importance; a subject which ought to arrest the whole attention of mankind. The duration allotted to the children of men on this earthly theatre has a bounded date. The various shifting scenes of life, the extinction of the human frame by death, and the gradual decay of nature's works, are plain indications that the world we inhabit is not everlasting.

everlasting. Hence, from an unconquerable abhorrence to utter annihilation, and a vehement longing after life, we are fond of looking into a future period beyond the grave, for that more perfect and unchanging state of existence, which, we are taught, by experiment, is not to be found in the reign of nature. The secret whispers of unassisted reason assure us, that such expectations are not chimerical; and the gospel confirms them by a decisive authority. It informs us, that mansions of felicity, undescribable by the most copious language, and inconceivable by the warmest fancy, are prepared for those good and righteous spirits, who, during their alliance with the body, have merited the approbation of their Redeemer; and that punishments, equally dreadful and ever during, are in store for every soul of man that doeth evil. Now since the days of man are so transient, that we may with great exactness compare them to the shadow which glides over the plain, and disappears in the same moment; since it is a solemn truth, that we shall step from this mortal life into eternity—that awful eternity—can we pretend to reason,

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reason, and continue indifferent, neither cold nor hot, to events so momentous, and so interesting?

The reflection of Christ, that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God, presents, it must be acknowledged, at first view a discouraging prospect. And if we understand it in a literal manner, the question in the text will not appear so improper. Few, indeed, could be saved, if riches, abstractedly considered, should exclude their possessors from the kingdom of God. This might justly be deemed a singular hardship; for some are born to hereditary opulence, in the same manner that others are born to poverty; and therefore would it not be absurd, and inconsistent with the justice of an infallibly-wise being, to punish his creatures on the simple account of their riches, which many do not acquire by their own exertions, but derive by a regular descent from their ancestors? In such a case, wealth of itself would become a vice, and poverty a virtue.

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We must then look beyond the letter for the full extent of our Saviour's meaning. The consequences of riches, the various snares, the many allurements with which they corrupt the heart, the fond attachment to the world and its vanities which they excite, the powerful arts by which they wean the soul from its Creator, the vast scope of exercising the evil passions which they offer, these dangerous qualities gave rise to the alarming comparison of the Redeemer, that men, so circumstanced, should gain admittance into heaven with more difficulty than the largest animal can go through the smallest aperture.

This I take to be a right explanation of this important scripture. And yet, notwithstanding this apparent easy solution, two very capital mistakes, and inferences, to the prejudice of the Christian Religion, have been drawn. The infidel has endeavoured to confirm himself and others in their unbelief; and the enthusiast has deeply injured the cause of truth, by giving to this text a literal explanation. There is indeed a difference between them; the former is influenced by the malignant

nant spirit of obstinacy, and the latter is the dupe of his own ignorance.

Hence, on the one hand, it has been asserted, with a singular degree of confidence, that a Religion, whose injunctions are so rigorous, and whose laws are so repugnant to the ties of nature, could never lay claim to a divine original; could never be dictated by a God of infinite perfection. If a Religion, it is said, descends from heaven, that Religion will undoubtedly have for its primary object, the universal happiness of men; all its precepts and doctrines will have a natural tendency to so beneficent a purpose. As the great light is not displayed in the firmament to illuminate some peculiar region of the world, but to dispense its cheering beams on the extended earth around; in the like manner a Religion, that cometh from above, would consult the general felicity in its higher and subordinate degrees, in its spiritual and temporal connections. But here the matter assumes a widely different appearance. The votaries of Christianity, to be approved by their great master, must not only be moral and good, but they must

must renounce every concern with the world; must forbear to taste, even in the most moderate degree, the innocent pleasures, and the comforts that sweeten life; must tear themselves from the soft embrace of affluent prosperity, and rush into the naked and meagre arms of poverty; must pass from a state of ease to labour, from popularity and respect to contempt and shame. All this was enjoined to the young man in the gospel. Nay more, the dearest ties of nature, the affections of friendship and consanguinity, filial reverence and fraternal love, the tender sensibilities must be rooted out from the heart of a Christian. Christ expressly saith, I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. So that far from advancing, Christianity wounds human happiness in a vital part, by proscribing every pleasure which might checquer the scene of affliction, and by striving to counteract those propensities of the soul, which incline us to a social intercourse of kindly offices, and render life, amidst its various sorrows, comfortable.

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Thus do its enemies unjustly represent the design of our most holy Religion. If this be the case, indeed, what need to trouble ourselves any longer about a system so oppressive nay, so horrid and gloomy. What need to employ our time and pains in studying precepts, which it is impossible, from the constitution of our nature, to obey. Better give up at once our soothing hopes of immortality; better to live as without God in the world, and die in the dismal certainty of annihilation; better is this, I say, than to profess a Religion which is so palpably false, and will miserably deceive us at the last in our glorious expectations. If the conditions, to which the gospel annexes eternal salvation, be in reality so dreadful and impracticable, the gospel is an imposition on the credulity of mankind; for the wisdom, that cometh from above, must be pure, then gentle and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits.

The enthusiast, on the other hand, though in his heart a warm friend to Religion, has painted her in the same disgusting colours, the creation of a heated fancy, not restrained by wisdom.

wisdom. Hence it is, that he darkens counsel by words without knowledge. Hence it is, that the beautiful countenance of Religion is, so disfigured, that instead of her attractive, her angelic graces, she is dressed out in sullen, morose, and unlovely features. Hence it is, that urged by the impetuosity of a blind zeal every harmless amusement, and necessary recreation, which may and ought to be enjoyed, is forbidden by the austere bigot, as incompatible with salvation. As if, indeed, the sober and temperate use of the pleasures which life affords, were not perfectly consonant with the strictest law of Christianity! In the name of goodness, let us have a rational Religion; let us have a practicable Religion. Hence it is, moreover, that we see the kind Father of all created beings represented, not in his proper attributes of tenderness, love, and mercy, but as an avenging God, continually environed by the instruments of his fury, darkness, fire, brimstone, and tempest. As if a being so holy, just, and good, might sport with the miseries of his creatures, or take the least delight in the infliction of punishment! Thus is the human mind frightened out of Religion,

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or, sunk in the abyss of despair on the contemplation of such a dreadful scene, is ready to exclaim, who then can be saved?

Now these are very uncandid, and unjust ideas of Christianity, which far from being a tyrannical and oppressive is the mildest and most benevolent Religion that ever blessed mankind. It demands no exclusion from the world, no abstinence from the society of our fellow-creatures, no melancholy, no tears, but such as flow from the eye of repentance. Far from exacting impossibilities; it makes the most generous allowances to human frailty; and far from requiring that its followers should tear the affections of nature from their bosom, it rather strengthens them, by enforcing that reverence which is due from children to their parents, and by making domestic and general charity its distinguishing character. The Religion of Jesus Christ, like the great founder, goes about doing good. In whatever parts of the earth Christianity is introduced, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever

soever things are of good report, and whatsoever things are virtuous and praise-worthy, march in her hallowed train. Grace shines around her with serenest beams; Faith, whose bright eyes dart forward into the happy scenes of eternity; Peace and Comfort, like cherubims arrayed in robes of purest white, and preaching glad tidings to the meek, the sorrowful, and the desponding, tread in her sacred footsteps. Mercy, with healing on her wings is there, and the prospect of everlasting life is displayed before her. Here is then no reason to suppose with the unbeliever, that the gospel is inimical to social happiness; or with the enthusiast, that its laws are so rigorous and inexorable. True, indeed, the young man in the gospel, agreeable to the description of himself, had been exemplary in his observance of the moral law; yet this it appears was not sufficient, and he is therefore enjoined to part with his large possessions, and follow the Saviour through a life of tribulation and labour. Now to a superficial reasoner this may wear the complexion of a very harsh command. But it is probable that Christ, who could penetrate the inmost recesses of the heart, soon observed his pupil was so much

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wedded to the riches and pleasures of life, as not easily to exchange them for the afflictions of the cross. This injunction besides was only applicable to the occasion, and is not strictly binding on Christians of the present day. In the infancy of the gospel, its professors were constrained to divest themselves of all worldly incumbrance, and travel into foreign regions to preach that gracious revelation. They were to bid adieu to every domestic and relative connection, to father, mother, brother, sister, and friend; and from the novelty, and nature of their employment, which laid them open to the cruel hatred of a corrupt unbelieving age, they were to suffer persecution, sorrows, chains, and death. And to accomplish the great purpose, they were endowed with a superior force of mind, and strengthened by the immediate and perceptible communication of the holy spirit. But now when the gospel is established; when the grain of mustard seed, which indeed was the least of all seeds, but now it is grown up is the greatest among herbs, and become a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof; we distinguish no apparent necessity for Christians to forsake the world, in order to become heirs

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heirs of salvation. The terms which the gospel prescribes are of a different nature: trust in God, and faith in Jesus Christ, a vital operative faith, producing love and charity unfeigned to our brethren.

Thus to the best of my abilities, and it is hoped to your satisfaction, my brethren, have I illustrated this awful subject; close we now this discourse with a short application.

Is the Christian Religion then so benignant, candid, and merciful? Is it so exquisitely adapted to render us happy both here and hereafter? Surely then it will gain a warm and steady profelyte in every man of reason. Surely it will introduce an ardent piety, and a virtue which is unblemished, in the universe. The case, alas! is not so. Charge not, however, the fault on the gospel, but on the obstinate folly of mankind. View, with attentive eye, the manners of the world in the present hour, of men who profess the name of Christ. And you will perhaps be tempted, though from another motive, to ask nearly the same question as the disciples; how shall they be saved? They are lost, they are lost.—

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You may observe not, indeed, the monstrous crimes, the idolatry, the savage ferocity of former days; but an universal relaxation of virtue, a prevailing love to voluptuousness, an artful hypocrisy; not, perhaps, a generally avowed contempt, but a careless indifference to the great truths of Religion. The very disposition renewed for which the church of Laodicea was censured: these things saith the Amen, the faithful and the true witness, the beginning of the creation: I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot. I would thou wert either cold or hot. There is a soft polish in the manners of this age, the more to be dreaded, as it makes the stream of vice glide along its surface with a smoother volubility. O ye men of the world, who float with a careless gaiety on the tide of pleasure; ye children of Mammon, whose gold is your idol; ye reprobate sinners, the avowed enemies of goodness and of virtue; reflect that your career is short, that death will mow you down as the grass before the scythe, and your joys will be turned into mourning. Let the text pierce home through your bosom to the heart; how shall we be saved? Frequent meditations on a point which so deeply affects us all, will
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stamp conviction on the mind, and be productive of such generous virtues, such a glowing faith, as will secure the recompence of a blessed futurity. And with a right spirit thus renewed within us, and its glorious fruits displayed in the remainder of our lives, let us banish all gloomy desponding thoughts with respect to the difficulty of our salvation; let us confide in the intercession of the holy Lamb, and in the tender mercies of our God, who is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. Such hope it becomes every good Christian to cherish in health, in sickness, and in death. O hope, O Christian hope of immortality! animated by thee, we support, with fortitude, the trials and the dangers of this afflictive world; we ride undaunted on the turbulent billows of life, and death carries no terror in his frown; we keep the haven of rest in our view; the haven of that rest which remaineth unto the people of God.

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S E R M O N VI.

ST. MATTHEW x. 28.

And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

THE instructions of our Saviour are in general characterised by a certain awful sublimity, which astonishes all the powers of the mind, while it improves the heart. The words I have just now read, lead me to this reflection. The circumscribed limits of human agency, and the omnipotence of God, which rules over his creatures in the present, and will dispose of them in a future state, are strikingly contrasted in this majestic period. The twelve apostles are commissioned in this chapter to preach the gospel; an under-

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taking of the utmost hazard, to which the blessings of repose and security, and the love of life itself must be generously sacrificed. The disciples, however, were but men of passions similar to ourselves, and consequently the same apprehensions of suffering, and the fear of a cruel death might have chilled their courage as the moment of action approached. Arguments, therefore, were employed to animate and confirm them in their resolutions; arguments which inspired them with a noble fortitude, by representing all human malice to be as impotent and short-lived as its author, and by suggesting to their considerations the real object of their fear, even him whose favour or displeasure is infinitely more worthy of regard, than the smile or frown of vain and perishable mortals. Fear not them, says he, having predicted their ensuing persecutions for the sake of his name; fear not them, which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him, which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

We may draw a great fund of consolation from this subject, by observing that the most virulent efforts of human enmity, must end with

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with this life; and secondly, that our appeal from the hard usage of an unrelenting world, lies at that everlasting tribunal where impartial justice shall be done to all. Here may be applied, in a figurative sense, what God says literally of the Israelites; I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry, for I know their sorrows; and I am come down to deliver them out of the hands of the Egyptians, and to bring them out of that land, unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey. Which sentence may be paraphrased in the following manner, and adapted to the Christian dispensation: I have seen the oppressions and infirmities of my children, who dwell in houses made of clay, for I know their afflictions, and I am come down in the person of my beloved Christ to heal each wounded spirit, and to convert the mourning soul from despondency to the most ravishing hopes.

Fear not therefore, ye patient followers of your redeemer, fear not the utmost extent of worldly malice, which can only affect the body with momentary pain, but may not reach

reach the unchangeable and ever-living soul, the noblest and most valuable part of man. The proud oppressor may extend his rod of iron over his unresisting dependents, the man of power may exercise a tyrannical dominion, the wicked judge, allured by sordid interest, may pronounce the unjust sentence, and trample, without remorse, on the cause of afflicted innocence; these cruel persecutions are not eternal. Their limits are appointed; thus far shall they be permitted to go and no farther. The prosperity of the wicked is not more stable than a traveller, who walks on some treacherous spot of unknown country; the earth rolls away from his footsteps, and he is buried in the mass of ruins. There are events, unforeseen by human prudence, which, directed by an over-ruling providence, may tumble him headlong down from the noon of his happiness, and reduce him on the same level with those whom his cruelty had harassed, or his pride insulted before. Then it is that the haughty brow of insolence is exchanged for the countenance of abject humility; then is a man convinced, by a harsh experiment, that every token of officious reverence, which he formerly received from the hand

hand of adulation, was not paid to his person or abilities, but to his power and riches. Whoever trusts in the perpetuity of worldly pomp (as was said by the sacred historian on another occasion) trusts upon the staff of a bruised reed, on which if a man lean it will go into his hand and pierce it. But if the prosperity of the wicked meet with no check during life, yet death, inevitable death, will soon advance, and tear him from the downy lap of ease and affluence. His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth, and in that very day all his thoughts perish. The precarious and transitory possession of our enjoyments here below, are strikingly represented in this affecting parable. The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully, and he thought within himself saying, what shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? This will I do, I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul; soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But suddenly, I say suddenly, when he thought of nothing less

less than such an event, God spoke in thunder this dreadful sentence: Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee, and then whose shall those things be which thou possessest?—What, my brethren, are the advantages of riches, splendor, and dominion, to a man unblest with more valuable endowments, to a man whose ambitious projects, or sordid inclinations, have extinguished in his heart the sacred flame of piety, or the bright glow of social love? What, I say, are such advantages, when the king of terrors, the relentless king, whom we cannot bribe with gifts, nor sooth with blandishments, shall have placed between them and their owners, the bar of everlasting separation? Their wealth will not illuminate the dark chambers of the tomb, shorten the long sleep of death, nor make the worms afraid to violate their dust. Such is the end of human pride, and human grandeur! From the short space of existence allotted to every terrestrial possession, let the rich imbibe a lesson of true wisdom, and display it, while he may, in deeds of goodness and mercy to his fellow-creatures; and let the poor man learn to despise the tyranny of the wicked, which must
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so soon be laid in dust, nor tremble at the voice of the oppressor, which must so soon be heard no more for ever.

But the tyrannical exercise of power is not the only source of persecution; the malignity of the wicked is exhibited in other instances. As the lilly, white emblem of unspotted innocence, is marred in the very bloom of its beauty by a sudden wind, so is a fair character sullied or destroyed by the envenomed blast of malice. The tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth. We are so ready to believe evil of others, that a studied and circumstantial detail is not always demanded; a word, a hint, artfully conveyed, will often stain a reputation. Envy, jealous of virtues which it cannot equal, is like the pestilence that walketh at noon day, or the arrow that flieth by night; it wounds in secret, or without disguise. There is no security against its shafts; they defy the utmost circumspection, and triumph over the best-guarded prudence. The loss of character is undoubtedly one of the greatest misfortunes which can befall us in the present world. A good name is the most precious

precious of all blessings under the sun; more precious than rubies, than food, or raiment, nay, than life itself. The charms of personal elegance, the mental abilities, the finest acquisitions of art, or the most admired endowments of nature, are not half so dear to a generous mind. Its fervent wishes are; may I pass through life, if not with riches, yet with honest fame: if not with pomp and splendor, yet with modest simplicity, and a faultless character. The consciousness of an unblameable reputation throws a certain sprightliness and pleasure around the mind in the same manner as the glow of health gives a ruddy colour to the youthful cheek. In every station it is our boast and delight, the ornament of riches, the consolation of poverty, and the sweet companion of our solitude.

Now to be robbed of this inestimable advantage; to see that delicate flower blown upon, by the noxious breath of wanton malice, and unprovoked enmity; conscious of innocence, and at the same time stigmatized as guilty; no probability of ever wiping away the undeserved reproach, no prospect of ever regaining the good opinion of mankind; these
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are afflictions, which to support with becoming fortitude, demands the steadiest philosophy of a Christian. To such persons, how refreshing is the doctrine of our text; refreshing to their melancholy soul, as the streams of water to the hunted hart, or the summer rain to a dry and parched ground. Fear not them which kill the body; fear not them who unjustly kill your reputation; for short is the triumph of their malice. Death will interpose, and the tongue of the enemy, dumb as the inanimate stone, shall not speak your name in the vast empire of the dead, where all is motionless and tranquil. The great avenger of traduced innocence has registered the deep injury in that awful volume, where the actions and the very thoughts of men are recorded. Your fame, vindicated before the assembled universe, shall break forth, as the sun through a gloomy surrounding cloud, with purer lustre, and more resplendent beams of glory.

To these examples of worldly malice many more might be subjoined: the history of the human race abounds in every page with such instances of its depravity; not only of power abused to oppression, of riches employed to domineer

domineer over the species of eloquence and great talents prostituted to varnish crimes, and to confound virtue, but of tortures inflicted on the guiltless, and too often cruel death ; merely to satiate the vengeance of a tyrant, who is himself mortal like the poor sufferer, and only distinguished from him by a casual birth to empire and command. The time would fail me were I to enumerate the various kind of miseries which the innocent experience from the wicked, and which are daily seen, felt, and lamented. Were I disposed to make you still less in love with the world, I might dwell on the description. My intention is not to represent life as an intolerable burden ; for life has its blessings ; but rather to open the view of that consoling futurity, which shall compensate the severities you may have suffered from your fellow-creatures here below.

It has been said, with great propriety by a moralist, that hope travels with us through life, nor quits us when we die. Hope is the cordial drop that takes off the bitterness of sorrow. Hence, as the benignity of God has kindly decreed it, there can be no situation from which hope is absolutely excluded : a
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ray will always dart through the thickest gloom of adversity, and discover some faint prospect of better days. Hope did not desert the heathens themselves, to whom life and immortality had not been published by a revelation from heaven. The light of nature suggested conjectures, that all in the frame of man was not mortal. There might be many thousands, who from the uncertainty which involved the subject, entertained no very firm believe of a future existence; but even they were not void of consolation amid the tyranny of the powerful and the malice of the wicked. They might still contemplate with delight that hour, which could not be far distant, when their labours and afflictions should meet an undisturbed repose in the peace of the grave. Death to them was a refuge from irremediable calamities. There the wicked cease from troubling, there the weary be at rest. The prisoners rest together, they hear not the voice of the oppressor.

And yet, it must be confessed, the mere hope of finding in the grave that peace, which is denied us here, is not altogether sufficient to strengthen afflicted virtue. Can virtue, can

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injured innocence be rewarded in the dead sea of forgetfulness? Little would be the encouragement to perseverance, small the motive to fortitude and patience, if no distinction being made between the oppressor and the oppressed, they were allowed to remain after death in the same quiescent and unfeeling state. We have better hopes; we whom the day-spring from on high has visited; to whom the sun of the glorious gospel has revealed the dark realm of death, and discovered the kingdom of eternal life, and pure happiness, beyond its gloomy precincts. The text clearly establishes the doctrine of immortality. Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul. Now it undeniably follows from this, that the soul is entirely distinct from the body. For if the soul had no peculiar properties, the stroke which deprives the body of existence, would annihilate the soul in the same moment. But the soul, a spirit immaterial, and invisible to the gross terrestrial eye, is secure from accidents and death. Let these ideas perpetually recur to us, and we shall easily defy the transient blast of calamity. Let our circumstances be ever so desperate; let us be overwhelmed by the united efforts of human rancour, let
our

our character be aspersed by cruel slander, our virtue traduced, and our best actions attributed to dishonest motives; let the hand of unrelenting power be stretched over us, and all the world around display the most frowning aspect; in short, let us figure to ourselves a situation in which, by a singular combination of disasters, we are left destitute of every human resource—then, let the certainty of that approaching revolution, which shall translate us from mortal to immortal, operate as it ought, and we shall consider these evils as a violent, but momentary storm, which announces a placid and everlasting calm. Be ye patient, says St. James, establish your heart; and why? For the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. Take, my brethren, the Prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering, affliction, and patience. Recal to your memories those courageous martyrs, whose virtues have advanced them to the rank of saints and angels above; illustrious heroes! who were prodigal of life in the sacred cause of truth. Some had trials of cruel mockings, and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted,

were slain with the sword; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; of whom the world was not worthy. They were all preachers of righteousness, exemplary in their lives, severe in virtue, and faithful to their God: which accomplishments of superior sanctity exposed them to the fury of a sinful and untoward generation. And what do you imagine supported their courage? What but the consciousness of possessing a soul, which the barbarity of their enemies was not able to destroy: what, I say, but the knowledge that death did not only finish their miseries, but gave birth to their triumphs? Such were their expectations, and we know they are not disappointed; for the beloved John himself, in his celestial visions, saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held; and they walked with the Lamb at their head, who was slain from the beginning for the sins of the world, himself the chief example of suffering innocence; and they were clothed in white robes of righteousness, and palms in their victorious hands; for as the Apostle was informed, they were they which came out of great tribulation, and had washed their robes,

robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

But to conclude. The latter part of the text contains these emphatical expressions: but rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body into hell. The malice of our enemies cannot pursue us beyond our ashes, and ought therefore to be no cause of terror. Death to the miserable is freedom and deliverance. The proper object of our fear is that being, who rules with uncontrouled dominion over the elements of nature, whose profound wisdom gives laws, and whose immutable decrees regulate the operations of ten thousand worlds; in whose hands are the issues of life and death, who will unlock the portals of the sepulchre, and call his people from their graves. But perfect love casteth out fear. This great being is not more distinguished by his omnipotence than his mercy. How sweet then the consolation. O how pregnant with exquisite pleasure is the idea, that when mankind, deaf to our earnest remonstrances, has excluded us from its protection and charity, and unmerited persecutions croud on our declining life; our

petitions shall ascend his gracious throne as the incense of the morning; that he will cover us with the wings of his providence; or if it be his good pleasure not to deliver us in the present world from the rage of the wicked, we shall be righted in that which is to come, and all shall be witnesses of his impartial justice on the day of general retribution.

These are exalted promises: be careful not to render them ineffectual by neglecting so great a salvation. The sinner who knew it, and forbore to perform the commandment of his Lord, has neither part nor lot in this matter. Recollect, O thou degenerate professor of Christianity, that he, the supreme God, who can protect and reward, can punish and destroy by the same almighty power. He who opens the golden gates of paradise to receive the good, may close the dungeon of hell on the soul; that most horrid dungeon destined for the reception of human wickedness; where it is said, as the extremest imaginable misery, hope never comes, that comes to all; but it is the melancholy reign of pale-eyed despair; repentance too is there, bitter unprofitable repentance;

pentance; and the devouring worm of a guilty conscience.

But thou, O pious, but afflicted Christian! proceed in the race that is set before thee with calm resignation, pray, in imitation of thy dying master, for thy most violent enemies, and expect the manifestation of the great God, and his son Jesus Christ, who though he delays his coming, shall not tarry for ever. I conclude in the nervous language of the eloquent St. Paul:

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breast-plate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. Amen!

beateness, and the devouring worm of a guilty
conscience.
But those O powers, that afflicted Christians
preached in the last times, let persons in
their resignation, pray, in imitation of thy
dying master, for thy most violent enemies,
and expect the manifestation of the great God,
and his Jesus Christ, who through his dying
his coming, shall not only for ever, I con-
clude in the new testament of the church.
St. Paul: *For we shall be saved by his grace, through the blood of his Son, Jesus Christ, by the washing of water with the word, by the Spirit of God, who hath quickened us, and raised us up, and seated us in the heavenly places, in Christ, that we might shew forth the glory of his grace, which he hath given us in himself, by the blood of Christ, who hath redeemed us from all iniquity, unto himself, a peculiar people, zealous of good works.*
Finally, my brethren, let those, as the
Lord, and in the power of his might, let
on the whole strength of God, that he may
be able to stand against the works of the devil;
For we wrestle not against flesh and blood;
but against principalities, against powers,
against the rulers of the darkness of this world,
against spiritual wickedness in high places.
Stand therefore, having your feet shod with the
armor of truth, and having on the breastplate of
righteousness; and your feet shod with the
preparation of the gospel of peace. Amen.

S E R M O N VII.

ST. MATTHEW xi. 5.

The poor have the gospel preached unto them.

WE are a little bewildered on the first perusal of the preceding passages. Could the Baptist doubt that Jesus Christ was the Messiah foretold by the Prophets? Could the herald of our Saviour, who was the voice crying in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight; who baptized him in the water; who saw the spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him; and who heard the voice of the father pronouncing, this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased. Could he demand a more ample confirmation of his divinity? Not the shadow of a doubt could operate on the mind of John;

John; his disciples, it is probable, were not thoroughly satisfied that Christ, whose fame was now spreading far and wide, was that great Prophet expected by the impatient world for so many ages. To remove their uncertainties, he bids them go to that singular personage, and have an ocular demonstration of his great power, and excellent wisdom. They arrive, and, without any ceremonious preface, put the laconic question; art thou he that should come, or do we wait for another? The answer contains no pompous display of astonishing actions, but recounts in the simplest terms irrefragable truths. Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see; the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached unto them.

Pause a little on the expression—the poor have the gospel preached unto them. Philosophers have sprung at different periods, who have preached lessons of morality to humanize their fellow-creatures; but those lessons were too subtle, too abstracted, and too refined for the comprehension of the common people.

These

These learned men besides, were too apt to pay excessive deference to princes, and to the rich and honourable of the earth. Their interest and happiness was peculiarly consulted, while the poor were left to wander in the desert of passion, and error. Nay, poverty was branded with a mark of disgrace among some antient nations,

Christ therefore gave as strong a proof of his being the true Messiah, by preaching the gospel to the poor, as by the miracles he wrought in healing the various diseases which depopulate the earth, and raising the dead from the grave. If he preached the gospel to the poor, then most assuredly his kingdom was not of this world. They who are ambitious of honour in the court of kings, flatter the passions and propensities of the great. The poor, cast as they are at a distance from high fortune, and terrestrial glories, have no interest to procure honours for other men, and of consequence are held in low estimation. But the blessed Son of God would draw no line of distinction between the poor and the rich. The universal salvation of mankind was the
prime

prime desire of his benevolent mind. Undazzled by splendor, and by state; by the pomp of heraldry; the blaze of power, or any other variable distinction, he communicated his sublime doctrines impartially to all. The high and the low were equally the objects of his tender care. His speech was like the dew of the morning, which distils, in softest nourishment, on the lofty mountain, and the lowly vale. How beautifully does Isaiah mark his pastoral care: he shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom; and shall gently lead those that are with young.

Men as they come from the forming hand of their Creator are equal. The disordered passions of mankind have introduced that vast disproportion which now reigns in the social world. I do not pretend to decry it. The laws of good order demand a regular subordination among the creatures of God. If mankind were all placed upon the same level, the earth, corrupted as it is, would very soon become a den of confusion. Men are endowed with a variety of talents and capacities; it is therefore

therefore necessary, to the good of the system, that some should possess more abundantly the riches of this world; that others should improve their brethren by their knowledge and genius; and that others again should labour for their subsistence in the Summer's heat, and the Winter's cold. But if they, whom we denominate the poor, from motives of fitness and necessity, must yield unrepining to their hard condition, let them have a right to claim: We must recollect, that the poor members of Jesus Christ have a soul to save; that they are heirs of immortal happiness; and that a time will arrive, when, if their actions be approved by the eternal Judge, their heads shall be circled with as bright a diadem of glory, as that of the greatest monarch that ever bore the sceptre of dominion.

On a superficial view of things, we are apt to wonder, that any evil should be found in the works of eternal wisdom; but a deeper insight into the subject will vindicate the ways of God to man. Look back to that fortunate period when primæval innocence was unstained by the grand sin of original.

The first progenitors



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niters of mankind, as we are taught by the Mosaic history, placed in the delightful garden of Eden, led a life undisturbed by guilt, and unclouded by care. They led the life of angels. No tempest, no heat, no cold, no thirst, no hunger were experienced by the blameless pair. The sky was serene, the air sweet and wholesome, and the earth without culture, brought forth spontaneously the conveniencies of life. The glorious spirits did not then disdain to descend from heaven, and hold familiar converse with Adam, as with their equal. The voice of God was often heard in the twilight of the evening, or walked on the breeze of the morning. Peace like a dove sat brooding on the face of the earth. In fine, nothing which fancy could devise, and infinite wisdom provide, was neglected to complete the felicity of our first parents.

Thus it appears, that a world so corrupted and depraved as the present, was not so at the creation. God is not the author of evil. Death and misery now triumph in the earth; but they found entrance through the fault of rebellious man. This is the fountain, whose streams, descending through the course of ages

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S E R M O N V H . I I I

to latest posterity, have poisoned our happiness. Hence ever since have floated on the troubled surface, afflictions, fatigues, hardships, sorrows, poverty, and death, the progeny of sin, and the extinction of the human life.

But this state of things is not everlasting. A great revolution at the end of time, will restore the world to its primitive purity and perfection. This wise decree of Providence will have its full effect at the appointed hour. It became in the mean time consistent with the goodness and mercy of God, to send the great instructor, that his poor ignorant children should receive the consolations of the holy spirit; that they whose lot had fallen on the rough paths of life should hear the gospel, which might train them in the proper line of duty, and discover to their despairing hopes the prospect of a better life in a happier kingdom.

The merciful Redeemer was aware of these circumstances; and, therefore, with indefatigable zeal, he announced the tidings of everlasting peace to the wretched and illiterate multitude, whom he found, at his coming, as
sheep

sheep without a shepherd. He delivered his new and important doctrines on the perfections of God, on moral virtue, on eternity and judgment, in the simplest language, calculated to impress the meanest capacities, and to affect the most vulgar hearts.

Should the man of the world, whose fancy is captivated by earthly magnificence, harangue on the nature of true happiness, he would pronounce the lords of palaces, and extensive domains, happy. Wealth, no doubt, when influenced by virtue and Religion, guides to happiness, and is truly desirable. But the external appearance alone would decide the point in such a man's opinion. Not so the blessed Jesus.—He knew much better the real interest of mankind; and his definition of true happiness is extremely different. None are excluded from it—for all ranks and orders may cultivate the virtues that lead to its beauteous gates. Blessed, says he, in his exquisite sermon on the mount, blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.

Blessed

S E R M O N VII. 113

Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called the children of God. Now this is all very plain. The most illiterate understanding may comprehend these salutary truths. The virtues here recommended are humility, meekness, righteousness, mercy, purity, and brotherly kindness: which virtues whosoever transcribes into his life and conversation, he shall most certainly attain the promised blessings, and rejoice for evermore, whether he be bond or free, or rich and poor.

To preach the gospel to the poor was a favourite occupation of our adorable Redeemer. That all should know God from the greatest to the least, was the object of his unwearied labours in the ministry; was the most fervent wish of his amiable heart. We find him therefore instructing the multitude, not in abstracted speculations about the essence of the soul, or the mysteries of the incomprehensible God; not in a high-flown language, and pompous metaphors, but in profitable truths, delivered in plain familiar terms, or conveyed through the moral of instructive similitudes.

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We find him again conversing with sinners; for as he affectionately expresses it, he was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And thus he gives a liberal invitation to all: Come unto me all ye that travel and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you.

Farther, to preach the gospel to the poor was a task well suited to his gentle and compassionate nature. It is recorded by the Evangelist, that when he saw the multitude without bread in the wilderness, his sympathizing heart was touched with pity. If he felt so deeply for the natural, how must he feel for the spiritual wants of the race of men. And with what an infinite assiduity did he apply his endeavours to heal and remove them? No words that I can offer will delineate this part of his character so truly as the following; the spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has appointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captive, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and to comfort all that mourn.

The

S E R M O N VII. 115

The state of mankind when Jesus Christ descended to redeem us was truly deplorable. The night of spiritual ignorance and fantastic superstition had overspread the nations of the earth. The features of those dark ages are marked by oppression, cruelty, and revenge. The expressions employed by the apostle to the Romans are not aggravated when he describes them being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity, whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful. The poor of that unenlightened period, were in a degree not much removed from the beasts of the forest; unprotected, friendless, bereft of all comfort, void of all knowledge, they lived unhappy, and they died without hope. In short, they knew not God; *—and no eloquence can speak more forcibly the wretchedness of any people.

* See Forster's Sermons, vol. i. page 255.

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Here then the interposition of Christ was most necessary, to give human nature an idea of its true dignity, to teach a pure Religion, and to discover the prospect of immortality. The poor had a peculiar concern in this gracious revelation, condemned to want and labour all the days of their life, it must impress their mind with infinite pleasure to reflect, that an eternal period shall be affixed to their sufferings; and they shall exist in a state of calm tranquillity, which, like mount Sion, shall never be removed. In the times above described, death was the utmost boundary of the wretch's hope; but now he reads in the oracles of the holy Jesus, that a happier country lies beyond the shore of the grave; where God shall conduct him to living fountains of water, and wipe away all tears for ever from his eyes. Let the Christian often revolve those sublime expectations, and he will hardly repine at poverty, or feel a moment's uneasiness at the scorn of the towering proud, when he remembers, that the levelling hour is fast advancing, when pride must drop from the highest elevation into the house of death; and, that before God, the distinctions which exalt so many of his fellow-creatures above him,

him, are of no avail ; but the master and the servant are regarded with an equal eye. Thus did our Saviour bring life and immortality to light, through the gospel which is preached, and excites joy, hope, and comfort in the bosom of the religious poor. You see, says the eloquent St. Paul after his manner, that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called ; but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise.

Thus you may take the subject in any point of view, and you will contemplate a Religion which speaks peace and comfort to the troubled in heart ; you will see that wisdom from above which is pure, then gentle, easy to be entreated : you will observe, to your inexpressible joy, that the poorest, and least-accounted of the children of men, if his heart be animated by the gospel virtues, may approach the most high God with the same ease as the greatest of mankind. Princes, though mortal, like the most inconsiderable of their subjects, are difficult of approach ; much intercession, much form and ceremony lead to their presence. But the ear of God is always open

to the supplication of the humble Christian. The infinite adorable Father! the Lord of time and eternity, whom the heaven, and the heaven of heavens cannot contain, will humble himself to behold the things of the earth; will stoop to the prayer of his penitent creatures. He requires no other sacrifices than the tears of a repenting heart. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

You are then much enlightened, ye poor disciples of Christ, much comforted amid the labours, hardships, and afflictions of a toiling life. You have heard the welcome sound of the gospel. How beautiful, exclaims the Prophet, are the feet of those that preach the gospel of peace! Those beautiful feet have trode in your habitations, and announced the glad tidings of salvation. You are no longer the forlorn, the rejected, the despicable outcasts, but the children of God, and coheirs with Christ. The distinctions which now separate you from your more opulent brethren are temporal, and temporal objects melt, like the gliding vapour, at the dark hour that buries in eternal night all the pomp of vanity.

We

We are all equal in the gospel; none is superior to another. Great then are your prerogatives, and much is expected from your knowledge. The fountains of grace are open—do not disdain to taste the living wave.

But what shall I say? You enjoy the light and knowledge of the gospel; and you turn that light, that knowledge to your destruction. You are told, that the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: and you follow the works of the flesh, which are adultery, fornication, uncleanness, hatred, lasciviousness, drunkenness, revellings. Believe me, the gentiles, who knew not God, shall be preferred in the day of judgment to this obstinate, and voluptuous generation. Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works that have been done in thee, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. Ah, Christians, this is not the way to make your calling and election sure!

Carry your ideas forward into eternity. Imagine that we all stand at the judgment

seat of Christ; your pastors and yourselves assembled before the Lord of the universe, and a voice proceeding from the throne of God, and demanding an account of our ministry. What answer could we make? O everlasting God! we taught them in the most earnest manner; we implored, we exhorted them by all the motives which can work on the heart of man; we exerted the utmost of those abilities which thou hadst entrusted to our spheres; we told them of thy terrors and mercies; we described the love of thy dear Son, and preached the gospel terms of salvation; but, alas! they were deaf to every persuasive argument. O! my brethren, must your ministers, who have been jealous over you with a godly jealousy, who have loved you as their own souls; must they see you rejected, and cast from the presence of God in the realm of outer darkness.

Far different be your lot, my beloved audience. If there be any consolation in Christ, if any fellowship of the spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfil ye my joy by your steadiness in that Religion which is the life
of

S E R M O N VII. 121

of the soul; so shall I indulge, and with great reason, the fondly-pleasing hope of meeting you all in the number of the redeemed, when the last trumpet shall have called you from your graves. Thrice happy day! when Christ shall have gathered the Elect as one flock, under one shepherd, and God shall be all in all. Amen.

SERMON

on the soul: to shall I indulge and with
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S E R M O N VIII.

ST. JOHN i. xvii.

The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

IT is an infirmity to which mankind in general are liable, that early prejudices are implicitly followed, and give the cast to every transaction of their life. The truth is, the mind once tinged with popular, and universally received notions, acquiesces in them through indolence, or for want of capacity, forbears to push its enquiries, and bring them to the tribunal of reason. Systems besides, which have the sanction of antiquity, and have been lineally transmitted through successive generations, grow sacred and venerable; Now, to most of these causes it is owing, that multitudes

multitudes have the highest reverence for Christianity, and profess themselves its votaries, without being in the least acquainted with the foundation of their belief: multitudes, I mean, to whom nature has not been niggard of her talents. As to the poor and unlearned, who have neither abilities or leisure to examine the truth, they must depend on the fidelity and knowledge of their teachers.

I propose then, in the following discourse, to consider some of the proofs which support the Christian Religion, from the birth to the death of its blessed author.

The text, in the first place, demands some explanation. The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. Delivered from the mouth of the Deity, the Mosaic dispensation claims a sacred origin. The laws prescribed to the observance of the Hebrews, were dictated to Moses by the God of heaven, who condescended to be styled the God of their Fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. What need, then, of another revelation? Shall it be presumptuously argued, that God has done any thing in vain? that his will
once

once made known, could be superseded by a more perfect declaration? that any ceremonies, or modes of worship by him once established, could be abrogated and overthrown? This manner of reasoning is specious, but not agreeable to the usual procedure of the Divinity. Progressive in his dispensations, the Almighty, at sundry periods, has communicated the knowledge of himself to his creatures. The human mind was not, at all seasons, prepared to receive it. As, if the sun should rise all at once in meridian splendour, the earth would lack the nutriment of the refreshing dews; so if the declaration of the gospel-truth had been instantaneous, the sudden blaze might have oppressed the feeble understanding, not regularly disposed for so great a revolution. Suited to the experience of the time, as it appears from the temper of the Jewish nation, the Mosaic law was productive of the utmost utility. But as its influence was restrained to a peculiar people, universality and eternal duration were not its properties. The purposes of its institution once completed, another revelation more clear and general became necessary; the state of mankind demanded it loudly.

Predetermined

Predetermined in the counsels of God, arrived at length the fortunate period which gave to the world a Messiah and a Saviour. A general and eager expectation prevailed, at that time, of the arrival in the world of some great personage, whose superior wisdom should enlighten mankind in the things pertaining to the supreme God, and make a more ample discovery of another life than had hitherto been compassed by natural reason. The philosophers, and learned men, were in possession of this idea; and the heathen oracles were not silent on the subject. The Jewish Seers, whose writings bear every token of a supernatural insight into futurity, some by well-adapted allegories, and others by distinctly specifying the end of his ministry, pointed out the Redeemer to their own times, some hundred years before the event. Led by a chain of prophecies to expect this signal interposition from heaven, the Jews, and other nations*, who from their intercourse with the Jews, became conversant in their writings,

* Vide a most judicious and instructive Sermon on the situation of the world at the time of Christ's appearing, by the learned and elegant Dr. Robertson.

Vide also Horne's Sermons, vol. i. page 372.

were

were anxious for the signs of his coming. Mens expectation thus awakened, the human mind thus prepared with the nicest art, and every circumstance properly disposed by infinite wisdom, Christ appeared.

Born from the womb of an immaculate virgin, his entrance into the world displayed the agency of an Almighty Power, and exactly fulfilled the prediction of the heaven-taught Isaiah. A virgin shall conceive and bear a son. The vision of an angel revealed to the shepherds, during the night, in the open fields, and his gracious words; unto you is born in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord; and the multitude of the heavenly host heard to praise God, and say, glory to God in the highest; and on earth peace and good-will toward men;—sentiments of the tenderest benevolence, and worthy of angels,—were so many stupendous proofs that some extraordinary Person, superior to the race of mortal men, was at that time produced in the world. The shepherds ran immediately to communicate the glad tidings: now here was no foundation to suspect a fraud: the shepherds, remarkable, as it is natural to suppose,

suppose, for the innocence and simplicity of their manners, could not forge so wicked, though ingenious, a tale: nor could they have any motives to spread a falshood, whose inevitable detection would expose them to scorn, and perhaps to punishment.

The arrival of some wise men, from the eastern part of the earth, at Bethlehem, is the next observable circumstance in the birth of Jesus Christ. The learned in the east, it is well-known, were fond of philosophical studies; and no branch of science was by them more cultivated than astronomy. In one of their nocturnal lucubrations, they were surprized with the sudden appearance of a luminous body in the firmament, which had never before offered itself to their observation. Astonished,* and concluded from it, that some great being was come into the world to benefit mankind, they watched its motions with the utmost vigilance, and following its progress, they were led from their native country to

* The Reader may see the reason of their forming this conclusion illustrated by the learned and exemplary Minister of Christ, Dr. Horne, in his ingenious discourse on the Epiphany.

Horne's Dif. vol. i.

Bethlehem,

Bethlehem, a town of Judea, where the strange meteor, which had hitherto conducted their steps, fixed over a certain house, and soon after disappeared. They entered, and finding an humble child in the lap of his mother, fell prostrate at his feet, with every token of the profoundest adoration. What can be said of this remarkable transaction? The history of the world, before or after, will not produce another instance of a birth honoured with such eminent and supernatural distinctions.

The wise men having passed through Jerusalem, and related the cause of their journey; the story reached the ears of Herod; the flame of jealousy was kindled in his dark suspicious temper; and concluding, that the Messiah's reign would be temporal, and exclude his posterity from the throne, he sent for these travellers, and by a species of refined dissimulation, he bade them go and search diligently for the child, and when ye have found him, bring me word, that I may come and worship him also. But they, admonished by a dream from God, and, probably, not unacquainted with the barbarity of the vindictive monarch, returned into their

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country

country by another way. The consequences justified the wisdom of the measure; for Herod perceiving the deception, and determined to extirpate this dreadful child, who, as he imagined, was to hold the sceptre by the ruin of his family, projected the most horrid plan that ever bred in the human mind. By his order, a band of ruffians was dispatched to make a general massacre of every babe from two years old and under, in Bethlehem, and the places adjacent, in hopes to involve him, whom he deemed his future rival, in the universal destruction. Vain man! how weak, how fruitless are thy attempts to defeat the purposes of eternal wisdom! For although, according to the melting expressions of the plaintive Jeremiah, in Rama there was a voice heard, lamentation and weeping and great mourning, Rachael weeping for her children, and would not be comforted because they are not: although thou didst crop so many sweet innocents in the first opening blossom; yet he, the Holy Babe, the prime object of thy vengeance, was secured from thy merciless hand. The Supreme, who foreknows every scheme of man, had removed him from the approaching slaughter, and

Egypt

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Egypt had received the sacred family. Previous to this bloody execution, the Angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, arise and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word; for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. It is not needful, I presume, to enlarge upon this matter; the narrative speaks for itself without any comment, and proves the clearest interposition of providence in the affairs of this singular child.

We are afterwards presented with an extraordinary anecdote of this great person, by the historian Luke. He mentions in general, that the child grew and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him. He then records that this reputed son of Joseph and Mary, at the age of twelve, was found by his parents at Jerusalem, sitting among the Scribes and Expositors of the Mosaic law, assembled in the portico of the temple, and there answering all their questions, and proposing others himself, with that knowledge, acuteness, and eloquence, as perfectly amazed the learned

Rabbi. Now, it may be demanded, whence did he acquire a wisdom so much above his tender years? a wisdom which those antient Doctors, after a painful application and laborious researches, had not attained? Not from his parents, they were unlearned like the rest of the poor. Not from education; their poverty could not afford a teacher to their son. But grant it otherwise, the un-ripened age of twelve could not treasure up so profound a knowledge, nor have displayed such abilities and discretion in the argument. The Evangelist has supplied the only and the just answer; the grace of God was upon him. The child therefore, it is added, was the darling of heaven and earth, he encreased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.

From this period the sacred writers give no account of the childhood of Christ and his manner of life, but they carry us to the opening of his ministry. He probably lived with his parents in the intermediate space, silently preparing for the execution of his approaching office.

Now

Now observe, with how perfect a consonancy to antient prophecy the scene of glory is introduced. In those days came John the Baptist preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. This appearance and preaching of the Baptist had been foretold by the prophets, who characterised him as the Harbinger of the true Messiah: and had he not thus appeared and preached, the credit of prophecy had been destroyed, or the person who assumed the name of Christ had been an impostor. Isaiah specifies the office of John very distinctly, the voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. The last of the prophets, Malachi, is not less explicit, when he says, behold I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord, and he shall turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to the fathers. From the austerity of his manners, his remarkable abstemiousness, and undaunted zeal in the cause of God, the Baptist was called Elijah by Malachi. Here

then the prophecies were exactly fulfilled : John prepared the way of the Lord and made his paths straight ; he preached repentance of sins ; he softened the hearts of many, and converted others ; he threatened, he exhorted, he rebuked, he encouraged, he baptized. Acquainted with the nature of his commission, and faithful to his trust, he preached not himself, nor made any selfish advantage of the popular applause and reference ; but with humility acknowledged that he was only the forerunner of a mightier person, whose superiority over him was so great, that he was not even worthy to unloose the latchet of his shoes. And at that instant, in the sight of a vast multitude assembled from various motives to hear the sermon of John, came Jesus to be baptized by this eminent teacher of righteousness. This was the fairest, because public, opportunity of beginning his ministry, and convincing the world that Jesus of Nazareth was the real Messiah, the long-expected Saviour. A miracle in confirmation of this truth was performed before the multitude : the heavens were opened after his baptism, and the spirit of God descended like a dove,

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and lighted upon him; and a voice from above, unlike the sound of human speech, was heard to say, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. This was not secret, nor was it done in a corner; the people heard the heavenly voice, and were certainly appealed to as judges and vouchers of the miracles: so that no scepticism or cavils can weaken the credit of the relation.

Thus was the Divinity and Messiahip of Christ publicly declared by the highest authority, by the voice of God.

And thus having laid before you some of the most material circumstances which attended the birth of Christ, and his solemn entrance into the ministry, we come now to examine the manner in which he supported the character of a Messiah and a Saviour, sent from heaven to instruct mankind, and to die for the sins of all.

The doctrine which he taught offers itself in the first place to our examination. And what is that doctrine but a system of Religion

and morals the most sublime, the most extensive, and the most perfect which the world ever heard or read. The reputation of Christ was in a great measure staked on his doctrine: for if among the representations which he made of the Deity, some ideas unworthy of his spiritual nature had been expressed; if among the various rules of moral conduct which he prescribed, some unnecessary and trifling precepts had occurred, we should indeed have allowed him a chief rank in the class of philosophers, but should not have esteemed him a divine instructor. The philosophers, it is well known, had no just conceptions of God; and it was usual with those great masters of reason to apply corporeal appetites and passions to the Supreme Father of the universe. But how did Christ illuminate the human understanding on this awful subject! he gave to the Creator those attributes which necessarily belong to Omnipotence; infinite wisdom, immutable justice, unchangeable perfection, consummate purity, and eternal love diffusing itself through all life, sense, and matter. His care over all creation is finely described in that beautiful chapter

chapter of Saint Matthew, where Christ refers his disciples, for the proofs of an existing Providence, to the lilies of the field decked out, without toiling or spinning, in colours which not all the skill of the painter can rival. His paternal affection to the work of his hands is also well represented in the tenth chapter of the same Evangelist, where the great Teacher assures his hearers, that not even a sparrow falls to the ground without their heavenly father. His retributive justice is exemplified in that touching parable of the luxurious rich, and the afflicted beggar, where he who had proudly spurned the supplicating poor, is after death condemned to endless woes, and he who had endured the sharpest miseries, is triumphantly carried to the bosom of Abraham, and all his calamities are forgotten. His saving mercy to the penitent is pleasingly shadowed out to us by this blessed Saviour, in that part of Saint Luke, where the tender parent embraces and forgives that thoughtless prodigal, who had wasted his substance in riotous living. These are conceptions of God beyond the power of unassisted reason; they are such as Christ only,

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only, the divine instructor, could have delivered to the world. We must therefore conclude that his pretensions to the title of the Celestial Messiah, so far as we have hitherto investigated them, are well-founded.

The attributes of Almighty God being thus opened to our knowledge, by what manner of worship we may best please him is the next object of our enquiry. Now this is a point on which no human preceptor could have thrown the least elucidation. Of this truth, alas! the dark ages of heathenism have afforded to posterity a melancholy experience. What follies, what cruelty are discovered in the pagan Religion! Not contented with adoring brute animals, or senseless stones, some nations thought to regain the favour of God by immolating their children on the altars of their grim idols. The prophet Jeremiah reproaches even the Jews with this unnatural custom, who made their sons and their daughters pass through the fire to Moloch. They, who used rites less barbarous, were as much in darkness as to the method of rendering God propitious to their

their desires. Now of this important affair Christ gives us the most exact and authoritative information. God, says he, is a spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth. Costly sacrifices and burdensome ceremonies are not here enjoined, but a heart unspotted from the world, a pure and upright conscience void of offence towards God and towards man. The most pleasing sacrifices he gives us to understand, are prayer, (of which he has set us a fine model in his own comprehensive form,) repentance, and holiness. He teaches us to serve God with humility, but with ingenuous affiance; with reverence, but not with slavish fear and superstitious horror. He exhorts us to depend upon his mercy, to rely upon his good providence, and freely open the sorrows of our heart to our Father and Protector.

Again: The superior excellence of Christ's morality declares him to be the Messiah that should come. His precepts are not, perhaps, digested into a regular body of ethicks, but scattered in various places of the New Testament, and on sundry occasions. Convinced
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that its utility must be obvious to every understanding, he does not, when he enjoins a rule of action, enforce it with arguments to shew its propriety, but he delivers it with a dignity becoming his office and character. This is plainly intimated by St. Matthew, at the conclusion of that admirable sermon on the Mount; when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes, who taught with imperfection and uncertainty. The corrupt passions of men are not flattered by his doctrine, but combated and reprov'd. The virtues which render us happy, and make this world an emblem of the heavenly life, are encouraged and warmly recommended to our practice. Ambition, a source of unspeakable mischief to the human race; Pride, which thinks meanly of others, and exalts herself above all; Revenge, that too often bathes her savage hands in the blood of her fellow-creatures; Cruelty, of unrelenting heart; Adultery, defiling that union which the laws of God and man have sanctified and honoured; Fornication, polluting that body which the scriptures

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Scriptures have called the temple of the Holy Ghost; Drunkenness, producing rage, blasphemy, and quarrels; Gluttony, pampered with excess, which uses the world to the abuse of it: these, under the severest penalties, are prohibited in the morality taught by Christ. His disciples must subdue these vile lusts of concupiscence, these foul deeds of the flesh, and prevent their encroaching to the destruction of those nobler virtues of the soul, which he takes every opportunity of pressing home to their hearts. Such are moderation in the pursuit of worldly honours; Humbleness of Mind, which rates its own qualities no higher than it ought; Forgiveness of Injuries, the certain proof of an amiable disposition, which attaches his friends more closely to a man, and reconciles his most bitter enemies; A meek and tender Heart, which renders good for evil, and overcomes evil with good; A Purity of Thought and Action, which neither meditates nor executes a base dishonourable deed; Sobriety and Abstinence, which keeps the spirit free, the mind tranquil and at liberty for the refined enjoyments of true Religion; and lastly, a diffusive Benevolence, which

which reaches to all our species, to every rank, sect, and condition. No wonder when he thus taught them in their synagogues and cities, no wonder the Jews should ask with astonishment, whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works?

The unbeliever, I know, has made it an objection to the excellence of our Saviour's morality, that he no where speaks of private friendship, or the love of our country*. The objection is surely unreasonable; can the heart be susceptible of universal benevolence and dead to the impressions of a generous friendship; and did he not give an example of patriotism superior to any precept, when he beheld the capital of his native country, and wept over the approaching calamities of that devoted city?

But the goodness of his moral rules was not the only evidence of our Redeemer's divine commission. When he came, the real state of man after this life ended, was unknown. Where did death consign him; to a better life, or to the original nothing whence he sprung? This was a question

* Lord Shaftesbury Characterist. Collins's Disc. on Free-Thinking.

much

much debated in those times; but all was conjecture, and the hope of another world rather floated on the surface of the imagination, than sunk deep in the heart*. Yet was it not void of useful consequences; for it proves that notions of a future life are natural to the human mind, and no doubt restrained many in the paths of virtue. But it was still an uncertainty; and the philosophers, as appears from several passages of their works, rejected it, because no satisfactory revelation was adduced in its support. The question still recurred what became of man after this life ended? Now, who but an heavenly messenger, a person sent from God to reveal his gracious will, could answer this question? Christ was that person; Christ was that heavenly messenger who opened the eye of reason which stood trembling and uncertain on the shore of eternity, by assuring her, that man was immortal, that the present life was only the infancy of his being, and that he should be advanced to a nobler station after death. He also declared the resurrection of the body, that amazing doctrine which the limited mind is not able to comprehend,

* Tully's First Tusculan Disputation.

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but which nevertheless is true as the existence of God. He declared that a day of final account was appointed, when the innumerable multitude of men and women who have lived in every age, should rise emancipated from the grave, be summoned before the throne of Christ, and adjudged to everlasting happiness or misery, as their religious or wicked conduct during the possession of this mortal life shall determine their fate. A doctrine which justifies the œconomy of the Divine Being in the permission of evil*, a doctrine as productive of comfort to the good, as of horror to the wicked. And thus we are not bound to our duty by mere temporal penalties, but as we value the rewards, and dread the punishments of eternity. Such sanctions are wisely held out to promote piety and virtue in the world. The generous mind, indeed, will turn to God and virtue, influenced only by the goodness of God, and the loveliness of virtue; but the wicked, the hardened, and illiberal, must be terrified into religion by the severest menaces.

* See Clarke's Evidences of Natural and Revealed Religion.

Such

Such is the knowledge with which Christ enlightened mankind; such is the Religion which he published; a Religion which no Philosopher, or Rabbi, or earthly priest did, or could have promulgated.

But was the wisdom of his precepts and revelation the only basis on which this adorable person rested the truth of his commission? No—to clear every doubt and suspicion, he exercised his command over nature by reversing or suspending its stated laws on particular occasions. Miracles were publicly performed in attestation of his divine authority: not indeed such magnificent and terrific miracles as the Jews beheld in the Mosaic day; but such, as being entirely calculated to heal the calamities of men, were mild and beneficent as the spirit of that Holy One, whose province it was to call the lost soul to salvation. At his approach the sick was blessed with reviving health; the lame started up and leaped like the bounding roe; the ear of the deaf was opened; the blind was saluted with the light of the sun; and the dead felt at his

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touch, or voice, the genial stream of life returning to the motionless heart; the furious tempest was calmed at his rebuke; and the hunger of five thousand was appeased with the slender provision of five loaves and ten fishes.

A more stupendous, though less public miracle was afterwards wrought. Willing to shew his disciples the possibility of that resurrection he had asserted, separating three of the most zealous and beloved, and retiring to a mount, he was transfigured before them in a miraculous manner. Clothed with the honours of immortality, his carnal body underwent a sudden change; the radiancy of his countenance was like the sun in unclouded brightness, and his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow, so as no fuller on earth can white them. Two celestial and beatified personages, Moses the great law-giver, and Elias, the powerful prophet, appeared to the three disciples, amid this dazzling blaze of glory, engaged with their blessed Master in familiar talk. His passion and death, his resurrection, and the advantages

tages which should accrue from them to mankind, were the subjects of this heavenly conversation. Peter, transported at the view, cried in an extasy to Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles, one for Thee, one for Moses, and one for Elias.

The candid mind, I think, must acknowledge, that he who enjoyed such a power over the works of nature, was a God upon earth. His very enemies have made the same confession: Rabbi, said Nicodemus, we know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.

Lastly. The unblemished life of Jesus Christ is a consideration of great weight in this argument. Exemplified in his inimitable conduct, Religion and Morality receive additional rays of splendor. In every part of his behaviour we discern that self-denial which he prescribed to his followers, that meek disposition, that forgiveness of injuries, that sobriety, that tenderness, and general benevolence, that affability of demeanor, that

patience, that goodness of heart, carried to the utmost perfection. Far from convincing him of any sin, his enemies, keen-sighted and vigilant as they were, could not reproach him with the least imprudence, the least indiscretion, or foible. St. Paul might well propose him to the imitation of Christians; be ye therefore followers of me, as I also am of Christ. All the godlike virtues and excellencies, which set a character above humanity, were never so well pourtrayed before, nor ever will again, as at his passion and death. Heroes have died to save their country: some have perished on the field of battle; and others have shed their blood on the scaffold in defence of liberty: and yet they were only led by the insatiate thirst of fame, to abridge a transitory life. But he, though immortal from the beginning, descended voluntarily to this state of humiliation, and incited by his tender sensibility for our lost condition, calmly submitted to the death of the cross, that his blood might atone for the iniquities of all, and mercy might spread her healing wings over the forlorn creation. And so he suffered spontaneously, the just for the unjust, and maintained from
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the first to the last, that innocence, and consistency, which evince him to be the Saviour of the world.

Now after this revision of his doctrine and character, I have no need, it is hoped, to ask, who say you that he is? You are ready to answer with Peter, he is the Christ, the Son of the living God. But may I not say with Christ himself, this peoples heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed. We are professors of his name, but not doers of his word. We love the world much better than we do Christ. We are void of that praise-worthy ambition which aspires to the honourable dignity of abstracting itself from the sensualities of this wretched life. We who ought to set our affections on the things above, are eagerly dealing in the vices of a wicked world, or intensely busied in the little schemes of this narrow scene. Oh! lost to virtue, lost to manly thought; lost to the noble feelings of the soul! grace and truth, alas! will have come in vain: Christ will have died, and salvation will have been proffered to us in vain.

My brethren, be persuaded rather to imitate that plan of sound Christianity, delineated by St. Paul, let love be without dissimulation; abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another; with brotherly love, in honour preferring one another; not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer. Do this before he comes, whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. Amen.

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II. CORINTHIANS iv. 8.

*We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed;
we are perplexed, but not in despair.*

IF our views were not extended beyond this scene of life, man is a creature whose situation is not very desirable. Pre-eminence in reason would only give him a pre-eminence in misery. From this reflection a strong argument may be drawn of a future immortality. God is just; and if his unerring wisdom has appointed a variety of afflictions to assail us in the journey of life, they are so many useful lessons to improve and regenerate the heart, so many kind severities to chastise that immoderate love, which we, too often, bestow on the objects of time and sense, and to fix the mind by gradual meditation on

the things above, on the heavenly Jerusalem, where all sorrow, and all misfortune shall be done away. The afflicted unbeliever, who has no expectation of surviving after death, may vent his impious murmurs at the dispensations of providence: while the suffering Christian, whose hopes are founded on the rock of ages, will sooth his drooping spirits with the sweetest of consolations, the full assurance of beholding that righteous day, when the cloud of evils, that surrounded virtue here below, shall be for ever scattered, and her resplendent form, in robes of unsullied hue, shall be presented to her gracious Father, and reap the great reward of all her miseries in his benignant and approving smile.

Yes, my brethren, in every calamity, and more especially in that fearful moment, when all the skill and assistance of human art has lost its influence; when all external consolation fails, such hopes alone can sustain the spirits of a dying man. Be faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. Remember all the promises in the gospel of Jesus Christ; consider that great scheme of superlative mercy, and your dread of pain, of sorrow,
and

and of death, will vanish, and the fountain of your comforts will rise and be enlarged with a full and undecreasing stream to all eternity.

Such is the language of Christianity, and such are the sentiments of its votaries. Their expectations are founded on the love of Christ; their consolations are derived from the ever-streaming fountain of redeeming grace, the least drop of which is a cordial that can sweeten all their pains and sorrows. But this will better appear on a nearer view of the subject. Adversity, Poverty, Sickness, and Death, are the greatest evils, which beat keen and heavy on the days of life. They assail us continually from within, and from without, and throw such bitterness in the cup of life, that without the promise of a future state of retribution, as held forth in the scriptures, the children of men would be inexpressibly miserable. We cannot build a moment on the stability of human joys. The life of man is like some days in the natural creation, now bright, serene, and chearful; and now darkened, rough, and stormy. His joys are short and unsubstantial;
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his pleasures vain and deceitful. In the sprightliness of youth, he is apt to form the most sanguine notions of happiness; age, in the mean time, advances; the golden objects are not attained; and he is mortified at a discovery which might with some reflection have been made before, that life is full of disappointment and vexation. Even in the purest and most continued state of prosperity, there is a perpetual revolution of pleasure, and of pain; of lamentation, and of rejoicings. Peace, and anxieties; care, and tranquility succeed one another by a rapid vicissitude. In short, of all human uncertainties, earthly happiness is the most uncertain. To-day, we bud, blossom, and flourish; to-morrow, comes a rude storm, and we fall, languish, and die. Just, therefore, is the pathetic conclusion of the Psalmist; verily man at his best estate is altogether vanity. The mind will often dwell with a pleasing recollection on the innocent amusements of its infancy, or some fortunate period of its manhood; and perhaps this pleasing recollection may be tempered with a kind of melancholy, that such enjoyments are now no more. But men have seldom wished to live over their past days again.

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again. Ask him who has reached the extremity of age, and is now ready to pay the last debt of nature, if he would, were it at his option, recal the moments that are gone, and begin the world anew. He will tell you, that life is a repetition of the same tedious forms, a reiteration of the same dull pursuits, and that he is satiated and weary. So said a wise and experienced prophet long ago; the days of our years are threescore years and ten, and if by reason of our strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength then but labour, and sorrow, so soon passeth it away and we are gone. Where then is our security? Where then are our resources in a world so uncertain and fluctuating? Where but in the Christian Religion? There be many that say unto us, who will shew us any good? Lord lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us! Teach us by attending to the voice of the Gospel in all our crosses and disappointments, not to depend on any circumstance of fortune, or earthly glory, but to rely on the near approach of that perfect state, where no change or inconstancy shall be found; but every pleasure shall be exquisite and uncloying; and every

every soul shall be satisfied with the purest, most serene, and everlasting happiness.

If Christianity then be so efficacious to soften the lighter calamities, how vigorous will be its power, how sweet and healing its influence in the heaviest, and, without it intolerable sorrows?

In poverty it is a sovereign balm. Poverty is no mark of God's indignation; does not derogate from the genuine worth of the soul, or weaken our claim to the inheritance of the saints in light. That claim is not built on any human privilege or title, but on grace freely bestowed, and on our attainments in piety. It is a truth enforced in the Gospel, that the virtuous, the believing poor, shall be called by Jesus Christ the blessed of his Father: while the rich wicked man, who fared sumptuously every day, shall hear the sentence of banishment from the presence of the Lord, and the glory of his power. No inquisition is made after riches in the world of spirits; the sole excellence will arise from the superior degrees of virtue. God, with impartial eye, regards his elected children.

children from him that sitteth on the throne of glory, unto him that is humbled in dust and ashes.

Do not, therefore, in any circumstance, do not follow the dictates of an Unchristian despondence. Though poverty, with its most dreaded evils, should rush upon thee like an armed man; though all nature should look black upon thee; though all thy earthly friends should desert thee in the day of utmost need; and thou seemest cut off from the number of the happy, like a branch severed from its parent tree; retain thy virtue, a jewel, more to be valued than all the wealth and honour in the world, and thou art fortunate, thou art rich, indeed *. Thou hast, it may be, no comfort from abroad? Seek it within thee; seek it in the retrospect of a pious life; seek it in the serene and self-applauding conscience: there it will be found, pure, full, and permanent. Seek it moreover in the goodness and omnipotence of thy God. There is one who is powerful to save, and mighty to uphold.

* Vide Seed's admirable Sermons.

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Even to your old age, saith the Lord, I am he, and even to hoary hair, shall I carry you.

Again. Be not too precipitate in lavishing thy admiration on the outward appearance of thy fellow-creatures. Draw no melancholy comparisons between thy poverty and their affluence; but remember, that in every station, to be good is to be happy. The Psalmist has some beautiful passages to this purpose—I have been young, and now am old, yet saw I never the righteous forsaken. As for the ungodly it is not so with them, but they are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. And in the latter part of the thirty-seventh Psalm, he says, I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay-tree. Yet he passed away, and lo he was not; yet I sought him, but he could not be found.

Be patient then, kiss the sacred rod of thy chastisement, and hope with humility, till the great day of retributive justice shall appear; when it shall be known that virtue, however degraded while on earth, and miserable, is exalted and glorified in heaven.

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Where can a more pointed example of this be produced, than is recorded by our Saviour in the sixteenth chapter of St. Luke? The rich in the parable was happy; if affluence, without virtue, be able to confer happiness. His dress was purple and fine linen; and the delicacies of nature were spread upon his table. The beggar, Lazarus, to human apprehension, was the most forlorn and wretched of beings. Disease, and poverty, in their complicated and terrible forms, were his sad portion. He solicited relief from the superfluity of his wealthy neighbour;—nay he desired to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. The latter unfeeling and hard-hearted, denied that scanty boon. Now observe the consequences. And it came to pass that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died.—But the description of his state after death—how tremendous, and how awful! And in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried, and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger

finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, son, remember, that thou in thy lifetime, receivedst thy good things, and Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.

But, it may be, you are raised above the evils of poverty, and your circumstances are easy—yet sickness is your unhappy lot. The materials, which compose our frail tabernacles, are corruptible, and decay every moment. As the corn yields to the sickle, as the tender leaf is swept away by the rapidity of the autumnal storm, thus fade youth and health at the approach of languor and sickness. These formidable enemies of the human frame, can bow the strong and valiant to the ground with the same facility as they demolish the most aged and feeble. Dost thou confide in health? Health may be destroyed by a thousand accidents; and is therefore a precarious tenure. Or dost thou trust in thy blooming youth? Thou art not safer than a drowning man, who catches at a reed to preserve his endangered life. Youth is not more secure from distempers than

than declining age. Dwell much on these reflections; and should some fatal sickness overtake thee at that period, when thy warm imagination had pictured years and years of exquisite happiness in the social life, thy hopes will be less mortified, and thy expectations less disappointed. Full many a bud that was fair and lovely to the eye, and gave the promise of a beautiful maturity, has died on the stalk, and lost its balmy fragrance. Others, like thee, have suffered, and millions still suffer. In the midst of life we are in death.

If thine be one of those rapid distempers which cut the thread of life asunder, and conduct us to the tomb with little warning, while the lamp still glimmers in the socket, and the blood still circulates to thy heart, humble thyself under the mighty hand of God; be persuaded that all things work together for thy good. Thy longer continuance among us is prevented, no doubt, for the wisest purposes. Was thy former life ornamented with Religion, Charity, Meekness, and Humility? Thy succeeding days might

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have been disgraced by the contrast to those shining qualities, by impiety, avarice, pride, and haughtiness. Thou mightest have dishonoured thy Redeemer by turning advocate in the cause of infidelity; a fashion too prevalent, alas! in these modern times; and run a career of vice, and died at last in all the horrors of unrepented wickedness; a conscience stung with anguish, and a soul endangered. But now removed in early youth from the coming evil, thy spirit, yet unpolluted, is conveyed to that celestial abode, where no sin and no temptation shall invade thee more.

But suppose thy distemper be of a lingering nature, presenting to thy view the ghastly form of death advancing slow in all its pomp of terrors. Roused by the gradual approaches of dissolution, the soul is better disposed to meditate on eternity. This solemn interval between life and death may be dedicated to repentance and self-examination. The love of the world may cease to influence the heart; and the fumes of vanity may be dispersed by the awful sound that calls thee to the grave. Reflections on the goodness of thy Saviour will
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animate thy hope, and smoothe the bed of pain. In all the changes of thy temporal existence, whether in the sickness of thy youth, or the languishing decays of thy trembling age— repose thy confidence in that God, who will not quench the smoking flax, nor break the bruised reed. Trust thou in God, who is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent; but all whose promises are yea and amen. Trust thou in God, and these light afflictions that were but for a moment, shall have worked for thee a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory *.

Such are the glorious and sublime doctrines of Christianity! They teach us, by supporting the miseries of our fallen state, to improve them into blessings, and inestimable advantages. In this light it will be good for us to have been afflicted.

And this leads me to mention their cowardice and impiety, who, instigated by a false point of honour, by the dread of poverty, by

* Vid. An excellent Discourse of Bp. Smalldridge on this Subject.

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the loss of fortune, by the keen touches of conscience or other adversities, disengage themselves from the burden of life by the desperate stroke of suicide. Unhappy men! who lend an eager ear to the fatal proposition: curse God and die;—but forget that wise, that heavenly reply; What? Shall we receive good at the hands of God, and shall we not receive evil?

But lastly. The Christian Religion will be found most necessary at the last stage of life, Must I (would a man of the world exclaim on his death-bed) must I no longer view the pleasant light of the sun; no longer breathe the sweet and wholesome air; no longer walk among the delightful works of nature; must I forego the pleasures of friendship; the social conversation, and bid a long adieu to every dear relative; must these eyes, alas! be closed in everlasting darkness; and this body—must it be stript of its ornaments, and descend cold and naked to the grave? * Death is a dreadful consideration—Yes—To thee, peradven-

* Vide Woollaston's Religion of Nature Delineated.

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ture, who haſt never conſidered its happy conſequences. But not to the real Chriſtian, not to the diſciple of the holy Jeſus. Far other proſpects dawn upon his ſoul. With full reliance on the mediation of his Saviour, he already ſees the gates of Paradife open, and anticipates by faith that fulneſs of joy, and thoſe rivers of pleaſure, which flow for thoſe who have obeyed the Goſpel in purity. Theſe expreſſions arm his breaſt againſt the king of terrors. I will ransom them from death, I will redeem them from the power of the grave.

Chriſtianity, my brethren, will alſo teach us a leſſon of fortitude when death ſhall deprive us of our parents, wives, huſbands, and children. To weep on theſe ſorrowful events is natural to affectionate and tender hearts: but to ſink depreſſed at the blow, abandoned to deſpair, as men without hope, is a ſpecies of diſtruſt in the providence of God. Do they not reſt from their labours? Are they not bleſſed, becauſe dead in the Lord? When you bend over the tomb of ſome departed friend, the laſt words that

dust to dust convey, and ashes to ashes, might touch the survivors with melancholy despondence; but how speaks the concluding sentence? In full and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be like unto his glorious body. We too must follow them. We too must rest in that deep silence where those lamented friends are gone before: but we shall rise together at the appointed time, and no accident shall break our eternal union. We may reap some instruction in this matter from the vegetable world, which presents us with various emblems of our own resurrection. The flower, which is defaced by the cold of winter, revives, and is damasked by the genial return of spring. The grain we trust to the ground, is matured by the seasons, and raised from the bosom of the earth in a different, more beautiful, and lofty form.

Be these reflections, then, our encouragement among all the vicissitudes which the children of men must undergo, more or less, during their abode in this lower region. Indeed, the
 slightest

lightest review of the world will immediately convince us, that a resurrection, and a day of final account must of necessity happen *.

Look round the world, and what a scene of misery is opened to the view. How many feel this very moment, all the sad variety of pain; what streams of blood are lavished to glut the ambition of earthly monarchs; men no better than the poor victims so miserably sacrificed; how many sink in the devouring waves; how many die of penury, and famine; how many pine in dungeon glooms, oppressed with the double load of want and captivity; how many thousand families have scarcely food and raiment; how many poor wretches are now living in a state of servitude, particularly in the colonies abroad; harassed by their barbarous possessors, who style themselves Christians, but are more cruel and unfeeling than the Egyptian task-masters; how many suffer cold, hunger, and nakedness, with all the dreadful evils that embitter life. These seeming inconsistencies in the plan of

* They who wish to see this argument discussed, may consult Clarke's Evidences of Natural and Revealed Religion.

Providence will be adjusted at the great day ; and it shall be fully known, that God is merciful in all his ways *. This sentiment is pointed out by the Gospel : he will thoroughly purge his floor ; he will gather the wheat in his garner ; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire. And finally ; the Saviour ought to be our model in every circumstance of tribulation. The great Captain of our Salvation went not up into glory without having first suffered. We remember the scene of his agony on the Mount of Olives, so pathetically related by St. Luke. There his affliction was so extreme, that his sweat was, as it were, great drops of blood falling to the ground. Now they who are skilled in the structure of the human body affirm, that the most acute pains alone could produce such uncommon effects. Yet, what saith he to the Father ? Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.

* The late Lord Bolingbroke himself, notwithstanding his illiberal invectives against those who argue for a future state, from the irregular distribution of good and evil in the present, acknowledges there is room for much contingency in the physical and moral world ; and that outward happiness, at least, may fall to the lot of the wicked, and outward happiness to the lot of good men. Mr. Hume, in his Political and Moral Essays, has made a similar observation.

Let

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Let us then, by calmly enduring, rise superior to all the calamities of this passing life. Compare the miseries of the present scene with the joys that shall be revealed. Conceive, if you can, the transport that would fill the bosom of a man, who having led a wretched life in the depth of a cavern, is instantly admitted to the open day, and beholds the serene face of the skies, and the variegated colours of the creation. Yet all this will not give you an idea of those raptures we shall experience when the Divine nature is applied to our mortal faculties. We shall then know these assertions of the scripture verified; the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God. In the sight of the unwise they seem to die, but they are in piece. For though they be punished in the sight of men, yet is their hope full of immortality. The hope of the ungodly is like the smoke driven with the wind, and passeth away like a shadow. But the righteous live for evermore. They shall receive a glorious kingdom, and a beautiful crown from the Lord's hand. Amen.

SERMON

S E R M O N X.

II. CORINTHIANS V. 10.

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.

IF we had nothing to expect beyond the grave, if death were to be the end of all, and the soul were mortal like the body, the motives to holiness and virtue, drawn from the consideration of future rewards and punishments, would cease to operate among the sons of men. The sinner, did preachers insist upon these subjects, might laugh at their declamations, and call their doctrine romantic fable. Free from the terror of God's judgment, they might tread
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in security the broad-ways of sin, and plunge without controul in every sensual indulgence.

But since the case is widely different; since the still small voice of reason, and the louder and more certain gospel point to an hereafter; and assure us that death is the passage to judgment and eternity; the most serious attention is due to their arguments who would train mankind in the exercise of the christian virtues for a state of consummate glory, in the paradise of God. The text is a striking assurance of a retributive eternity: for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. Thought, full of joy and consolation to the good and just; but big with terror and confusion to the hardened and remorseless sinner; against whom the gates of the blessed mansions will be shut for ever.

Death is the lot of all; the richest must go to the grave in company with the poorest of mankind. No art of the wisest physician

can

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can recal the spirit to the lifeless body. The moment of our departure once arrived, however unwilling, however unprepared for the solemn change, we must obey the voice of death. We may not say to death, go thy way for this time, when I have a convenient season I will call for thee. Death is not to be flattered by the most subtle courtier; no excuse, no denial no evasions, no eloquence, no tears, no sighs, no entreaties, can stop his arm. Pomp, grandeur, earthly vanity, merit, virtue, beauty, learning, are no less his prey than poverty, vice, deformity, and ignorance.

Death, however viewed in the light of Christian philosophy, is not so terrible as it generally appears to the superficial apprehension of worldly men. For what is death in reality? A separation of the soul and the body for a certain time. The body is only a frame which contains the soul; the soul is the vital principle, that animates and supports it; immortal, unchanging. When the body weakened by sickness, or impaired by age, is no longer capable of entertaining the
spiritual

spiritual guest; the soul released from the bands of mortality, flies to the God who gave it. The body mixes with its native dust, and meets a long repose from labour and sorrow, till the time appointed for its reunion with the spirit, be arrived. The curious, and inquisitive mind, always forward to pry into the unknown regions of futurity, has asked, and debated the question with great eagerness, what becomes of the soul during its separation from the body. Various are the opinions delivered on this point by learned men. Ingenious, but not convincing; speculative, but not satisfactory; they have not instructed their readers in a doctrine which the Gospel has left unrevealed. The scriptures only say, after death comes judgment. The most probable, and least presumptuous inference which can be made from such expressions is, that the soul, after death, is presented before the tribunal of God, and hears the righteous sentence immediately pronounced; then it departs into a place of happiness or misery allotted for its abode, until the day of universal judgment. Not death itself, therefore, but its consequences,

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quences, ought to be a source of terror to the impious. These consequences ought to make us very serious and diligent in the great business of Religion; of Religion without hypocrisy; of sanctity without pride; of spirituality without affectation. Of these consequences we have short but sublime descriptions in the holy writings; and from what is there mentioned we may in some measure conceive the awful ceremonies of the judgment.

The time approaches with great rapidity; each year, each month, each day, each hour, each moment is precious. Hear it, and be continually on your guard; let your lamps be trimmed, and your loins well girded, for the Son of Man will come with silence and secrecy, as a thief who robs your treasure. Pass but a few short fleeting ages, or years perhaps, and the trumpet of the great Archangel shall sound to the four corners of the world. Its inhabitants shall hear the loud signal of the latter day; the dead of the earth and sea shall awake from their long sleep of the grave, and resume their
former

former shape and life. But what tongue can relate the countless multitude? Sects, Parties, Religions, Jews, Infidels, Christians, Atheists, Sceptics, Princes, Conquerors, Martyrs, Priests; Rich and Poor; Slaves and Tyrants; Masters and Servants, shall be mingled together, and those distinctions be known no more. The appearance of nature will be greatly changed, and impressed with mournful tokens of its dissolution. The sun, that cherishes, and shines around the world with so much glory, shall withdraw his light; the moon, whose milder beauties cheer the horrors of night, shall be turned into blood; and the stars shall be extinguished for ever.

Supported on the clouds, surrounded by armies of angels, and archangels, of saints and prophets; and cloathed in dazzling beams of celestial glory, shall be seen the great impartial Judge, the Son of God, the Divine Jesus. Then will mankind approach the tribunal of Omnipotence. The judge, with candour and impartiality, will examine the secret and open faults committed by every man

man in defiance of the light of reason, and the rules of his Gospel. The good and the wicked he will divide into two classes, and place the former on his right, the latter on his left hand. May we suppose, without presumption, that he will address himself to the wicked in the following manner? To the proud:—Did I endow you with superior talents to exalt and set yourselves above your fellow mortals? Was it not your duty to consider these distinctions as the gift of heaven, not as a reward of your merit and capacity? Was it not your duty to love and protect your brethren; and, by exhibiting a pattern of humility, teach them dependence on their heavenly Father?

To the hypocrites:—You have mocked and degraded my Religion, by making it subservient to your wicked purposes. Sanctity was in your face; the most malignant passions at your heart. You disgraced my holy temple, and my worship, by your presence. Your long prayers, the falling on your knees, and the lifting up of your hands, were exterior appearances to be seen of men: but in purity, but in goodness, and in truth, you

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never

never approached my presence. Your cant, and affected devotion, I abhor.

To those who were rich in the goods of this world, and had no bowels of mercy for the sufferings of the poor : —Whatever could be wished to make life comfortable, abundance of wealth, extent of power, were bestowed on you. Your days were not embittered by fatigue and labour ; you tasted the bounties of nature in lavish profusion ; your tables were covered with dainties, procured by the toil of others. To supply your luxury, the sea was ransacked, and the earth drained of her productions. What fruit have ye produced in return for such signal blessings ? What improvements have ye made of my ten talents ? Ah ! how truly did I say, that it was easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven. The pleasures and amusements of the world engrossed all your occupations. The sums which you squandered on your lusts and appetites, might have softened the hardships of poverty, and rescued many a virtuous family from want and beggary. But you
were

were deaf to the voice of distress. The tears of widows fell in vain; and the cries of desolate orphans were drowned amid your dissipation and extravagance. Verily, verily, I say unto you, they have suffered evil in the world, and have now their reward; but ye are tormented.

To the wicked and negligent pastors:—Your opportunities of improvement in virtue and Religion were very great. Separated from your tender years for the service of God and his church, you were trained up by a course of necessary learning for the most sacred of all professions. The salvation of your brethren depended greatly on your cares and labours. Your piety, your wisdom, and your virtue, ought to have shone with eminent splendor, as lights on a hill. You ought to have visited the sick in their affliction; to have spoke comfort to the broken-hearted; to have confirmed the strong in the faith, and supported the weak. But, the tenor of your life little corresponded with your doctrine from the pulpit; was little adapted to the edification of your flock. You were ambitious, or

sensual. Pleasure, or preferment, had more charms for you than the kingdom of God and his Christ. You have sinned against your better knowledge, and involved many others in your destruction. The souls of your fellow-creatures are lost through your negligence, or bad example; and I will make inquisition at your hands.

Not these alone, but a catalogue of horrid vices will be then produced; murders concealed or discovered, robberies, fraud, treachery, false witness, extortions, covetousness, oppression, perjury, drunkenness, fornication, impurities.

But turning with a benignant countenance towards the good and elect, the Judge will enumerate their particular perfections. The humble, the charitable, the afflicted for the sake of righteousness, the religious poor who have suffered adversity, the chaste and temperate, the kind and sweet natured master, the patient and laborious servant, the meek and quiet Christian, the pious minister who devoted his life to the salvation of his brethren, shall find their generous virtues were not in vain. In fine, here shall have place

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place whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, and whatsoever things are of good report.

But no force of expression, no effort of human eloquence, can equal the Scripture account of this momentous event. When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory. And before him shall be gathered all nations, and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats. And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand: come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee

an hungered, and fed thee; or thirsty, and gave thee drink; when saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in; or naked, and clothed thee; or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them: verily, I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. Then shall he say also unto them on his left hand depart: from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me not in; naked, and ye clothed me not; sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, or a thirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, and in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye did it not to the least of these, ye did it not unto me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous unto life eternal.

Then

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Then shall the righteous be introduced by angels with songs of triumphs, with hallelujahs of praise, and the voice of exultation, into the building of God, the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Welcome, ye good and faithful servants! Ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels: to the general assembly and church of the first-born which are written in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant. Gracious God, what expressions are these! how ravishing the delights, how unbounded are the blessings, which for thy saints are reserved in heaven! Yes, thou meek Redeemer, thou Saviour of our souls, thou finisher of our faith, we look down upon this world, and its most desirable pleasures, as the illusions of a passing dream. We wait to be dissolved at thy appointed time. Our souls are athirst for the mansions of thy Father's house, for the courts of the living God: we pant for the presence of the living God.

And now, my brethren, holy and beloved, do my words affect your hearts, do they pierce the inmost recesses of your souls, or return to me void and productive of no fruit? O that I knew how to awaken your spirit on this subject; Consider, I pray; you have only a few gentle and profitable duties to discharge for the attainment of so much glory. Religion is not grievous, but sweet, and refreshing to the soul, as honey to the taste. Religion delights not in austere severity, in a grave melancholy countenance, in a sorrowful demeanor, or a total seclusion from the world and its pleasures. Its precepts are rejoice; and again I say, rejoice.

One thing more I shall press home upon your consideration. Reflect on the shortness of life, and the state of the dead. The life of man is justly compared to that flower, which in the morning flourishes in all the sprightliness of beauty; but in the evening hour, stript of all its gaiety, is dried up, and withered on the field. Devote not then so short a space to the pursuit of enjoyments which can never satisfy the immortal soul; but rather croud it with the duties of Religion.

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ligion. Add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity; perfections that will fit you for the possession of those spiritual joys which are at God's right hand from age to age. The time, allotted for the practice of these virtues, is very short. Apply it, while you may—repent—and be happy. The grave is no place for conversion; there is no praying in the tomb; no charities among the cold unfeeling worms. It will be then too late for your spirits to bewail their follies, and lament their neglect of the Gospel, in the day of grace. Be touched, my brethren, be persuaded by these considerations, amend your lives, and you shall stand on the right hand at the latter day.

SERMON

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ST. LUKE xxiii. 42, 43.

*And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me
when thou comest into thy kingdom.*

*And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee,
to-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.*

REPENTANCE is a lesson enforced by the Scriptures as one of the leading steps to salvation.—Unless ye repent, ye shall all perish,—Repent ye for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. The apostles, the primitive fathers of the church, and the ministers of God, in all ages, have preached it from the closet, and from the pulpit. It is a lesson which often recurs to the ear of the people; but, unhappily, like the descending snow which melts

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melts as it falls, it leaves behind no traces on the heart. The truth is, we are too averse from serious contemplation, are much too gay, too thoughtless, too much enamoured of the present world, to make an early and regular preparation for another. The voice of bewitching pleasure is more sweet and melodious to the ear of youth, than a solemn call to repentance. Let us anoint ourselves with the chief ointments; let us drink wine out of bowls; let us chant to the sound of the viol, and freely taste the proffered delicacies of bountiful nature. The task of repentance is painful and melancholy, ill suited to this joyous day of our life. When age hath shed its snows on the hoary head, and a group of infirmities shall deaden the sense of every pleasure; when those amusements that allure us now can charm no more, we may then review the past, and bewail our follies and our sins. Nay, it is not unusual among this kind of reasoners to corroborate their arguments, by the gracious promise of Jesus Christ to the malefactor on the cross,—To-day thou shalt be with me in Paradise.

But

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But indeed, my brethren, of all the arts employed to reconcile, and to sooth the conscience, none is more deceitful and more pernicious. It is an argument that speaks peace where there is no peace.

As to the resolution of consigning repentance to the decline of life, nothing can vindicate its propriety but a supernatural assurance, that death will forbear to strike the mortal blow, till the labour of conversion be completed; and our peace with God be ratified in heaven. And as to the latter instance of the robber on the cross—Who can develop the motives of unsearchable grace? The heart of that unhappy man was, no doubt, regenerate in his last moments: his contrition was spontaneous, genuine, unaffected: his faith sound, pure, animated; and, in return for so sincere a repentance, his eyes were closed with the transporting assurance—To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise. But this event is peculiar in its nature, full of miraculous circumstances, and will never meet its parallel in the course of time. Nay more, the sacred writers have not recorded another instance

instance of a sinner so pardoned on the bed of death.

Be not deceived, O children of men, with the vain imagination, that God will operate a miracle in your favour; that a carnal heart can be regenerate in the twinkling of an eye, at the last gasp of life. Remember, that the age of miracles is past. God has never left himself without a witness, but hath displayed his magnificence, his terrors, and his mercy, in the patriarchal and prophetic days; and last of all, by that act of superlative mercy, the sacrifice of his only begotten and beloved Son for the redemption of fallen human nature. The evidences and doctrines of the Gospel, which this eminent messenger has published, are so very clear and interesting, that nothing can be adduced to enforce them. Shall the sinner then exclaim;—Nay, but if one came unto us from the dead we should repent. No—for should one of those brethren, who is now sleeping in the tomb, be permitted to arise from that still mansion, in all the gloomy and terrific pomp of death, and stand before us now to display the secrets of the other world, he
could

could not add a letter to the persuasive arguments of the Gospel. If we hear not the Son of God and his disciples, neither shall we be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

But, alas! what avails it, that reason and Scripture combine to set forth the necessity of an early reformation? What avails it that inspired eloquence has lavished all her art in the most pathetic and soul-moving addresses, if men are deaf to the voice of so sweet a charmer? What avails it that Jesus shed his blood on the cross, if they rely for salvation on the sighs, the murmurs, and the groans of a dying hour? Can that arduous, that important affair, be determined in the circle of so short a period, which should be the great object of every moment in the life of man? Is the day of infirmity a fit time of preparation for immortal happiness, which demands the most unwearied perseverance in Religion and virtue? That distemper, which undermines the corporeal strength, will debilitate and relax the mental faculties. And can a sick mind, in a languid body, take a calm retrospect of former days?

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When age has bowed us to the ground, and languors have unsteadied the whole frame; when tortures shoot through every drooping limb, no longer able to perform its wonted office; when every sun that rises is a day of pain, and every night that closes is a night of restlessness and complaining; when sleep, the sweet restorer of afflicted nature, has withdrawn his consolation; and when, terrified with the dreary spectre of death now stalking before us, we find no repose from within or from without; where is that coolness, that serenity, that recollection, calculated to address the throne of mercy, and implore the forgiveness of an offended Deity?

The most unblemished character that ever graced the records of time has need of repentance, for sin is not separable from our nature; and after all we are unprofitable servants. Can he then, whose sensual actions have denied the faith, whose soul has grovelled amid the filth of earthly pollutions, and persevered in that debasement to the last dregs of ebbing life; can this sinner efface, by a few sighs in his last agonies, half an age of complicated wickedness? A few sighs, extorted;

extorted; peradventure (for ah! what sagacity can trace the windings of the human heart?) extorted by the horrors and despair of his irretrievable situation? God is not so mocked. How moral and instructive then, yea how energetic are the expressions of the elegant Solomon? expressions which ought to be graven with a pencil of adamant on the heart of youth! Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.

But it may be said, the means that lead us to the dark cave of death are various; some are gentle, and others more severe. It is not the miserable lot of all to expire in the violence of pain. Some go down to the grave by gradual imperceptible decay, as lamps are extinguished when their oil is consumed. A mind, so free from the sharp pangs of sickness, may surely have leisure and capacity to reflect on its past misdeeds, to weep and to repent. I would not by any means persuade any of my brethren to

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make that experiment, that dangerous experiment. The carnal heart is not easily cured of its evil propensities. Time alone, and persevering application, can remove from a field so rank, the noxious weeds of a corruptible world. The mind, accustomed for a length of years to wallow in the streams of sensuality, will not suddenly be made to comprehend the love of Christ, to feel the power of faith, and to relish the charms of virtue. Yet, till this great reformation be accomplished, repentance is not sincere. And it would be presumptuous to suppose, that God will vouchsafe some extraordinary portion of his grace and spirit to that obstinate sinner, who, in the wantonness of his youth, and the vigour of his prime, rejecting all the means of proffered salvation, has continued unreclaimed, till age has stopped him in his full career. God, indeed, will have mercy on whom he will have mercy. But justice striveth against mercy. O that parents, therefore, that tender, affectionate, christian parents, would teach their children from the earliest infancy to walk in the paths of Religion; so would their old age be

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be a smooth and pleasurable old age; so should they have no cause to lament and despair in their death, but their eyes should close in the full hope of a blessed immortality.

But let us suppose, for a moment, that sickness and old age are in some cases no impediments to the effects of repentance. Let us grant so much, and it is granting a great deal; yet is such amendment, protracted to so late a season, unpleasing to the great Author of our existence. His goodness demands our warmest and continual returns of gratitude and adoration: there ought to be no pause, no vacancy in our virtuous thoughts, and pious actions, from the first enjoyment of our reason, to the very moment of our death. We ought to live, to move, and have our being, for the service and glory of God. Who gave us life; who sweetened it with so many comforts; who makes his sun to shine upon the just, and upon the unjust; and who sends the drops of rain to nourish the soft bosom of the earth; who

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blest the nations with the sound of the gospel; who bought us with a price of redemption; and who shewed the path of eternal happiness to undeserving mortal men, lost as they were before in the labyrinth of sin, and bewildered in the vale of tears, and the region of death? Ah! my Christian brethren, do such questions need an answer?

And shall this gracious and condescending God, shall this awful and dreaded Being, shall this almighty and universal Father, be forgotten even a moment by his frail and dependent creatures, whom the breath of his displeasure can sweep from the face of the earth, as the light feather is driven before the storm? But why did I say a moment! Days, weeks, and years, roll over the head of thousands, undistinguished by a single action, which might indicate a remembrance of their God. And yet, perhaps, they are so blinded as to imagine that a late repentance will atone for a multitude of sins. What? is the conclusion of life a fit season to begin a course of piety?

piety? The Psalmist argues with great consistency, when he says, I made haste and delayed not, to keep thy commandments: I am content to do thy will, O my God.

No imagination, I am sure no language, can picture an object so delightful as a religious young man. How does it fill the moral and reflective mind with pleasure, to see the passions subdued at a season when they usually rage in unbounded violence; the love of intemperate pursuits banished from the happy breast, at an age when the full efflorescence of health, and the high flow of animal spirits, prompt to bewitching scenes of sensual gratification; at a time when Religion is set at nought by the gay and licentious; and virtue, seen in the form of youth, is a rare uncommon object. Not unmindful of his baptismal vow, he truly renounces the Devil and all his works, the vain pomp and glory of the world with all covetous desires of the same, and the carnal desires of the flesh.

And are these no victories, are these no triumphs? The warrior, who levels cities in the dust, and lays whole countries desolate, may live in the praises of short-sighted men; tombs, statues, and monumental inscriptions, may combine to preserve his memorial from the ravages of death and the grave. But human praise is mortal; tombs, statues, and monumental inscriptions, will decay: but that praise, which is the certain reward of early and regular piety, is real, precious, durable: it is the praise of God, of Christ, and of angels, bestowed on the faithful Christian, when deeds of courage, and the trophies of heroic valour, shall be found wanting in the ballance of eternal judgment.

Go on, thou virtuous and admirable youth! Stem the turbulent stream of life with resolution. Thy harbour is paradise, and thy pilot God. The blessing of heaven shall descend upon thee in its selectest influence, and look, whatsoever thou doest it shall prosper. The calm of an untroubled
conscience

conscience shall be thy friendly attendant through all the changes of this mortal life, and at the moment of thy dissolution, no late repentance shall plant the thorns of despair in thy peaceful bosom; but hope and grace shall wing thy departing soul to thy Saviour and thy Lord.

What allusions, what similitudes shall the preacher employ to describe the beauty of a character so illustrious and amiable? Shall he call it a diamond set in gold, or a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season, and whose leaf shall not wither; or a flower, which, having bloomed upon the earth, and breathed its sweetness on the scented air around, shall soon be transplanted in the garden of God, to delight unbodied spirits, and angelic inhabitants?

Is such a character then so highly finished and pleasing? Will it secure the approbation of the great King, the antient of days, at the final judgment? Let us strive then,

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Christians, let us strive, for the love of God, and the salvation of our souls, to imitate and equal its virtues. But no: we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. We are swayed entirely by temporal matters, the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. We are so immersed in business, or in pleasure, that no pause is allotted to reformation. The necessity of an early repentance is self evident, but, strange to recount! It is still protracted, lengthened out, and delayed. To-morrow, to-morrow, is the general voice; and to-morrow, to-morrow, never, never comes.

A wretch* that is condemned to die to-morrow, cannot forget it; and yet, poor sinners, that continually are uncertain to live an hour, and certain speedily to see the majesty of the Lord to their inconceivable joy or terror, as sure as they now live on earth, can forget these things for which they have their memory; and which, one would think,

* Baxter, as quoted by Bates in his Funeral Sermon,
should

S E R M O N XI. 201

should drown the matters of this world, as the report of a cannon does a whisper, or as the sun obscures the poorest glow-worm. O wonderful stupidity of an unrenewed soul! O wonderful folly and wretchedness of the ungodly! That ever men can forget, I say again, that they can forget eternal joy, eternal woe, and the eternal God, and the place of their eternal unchangeable abode, when they stand ever at the door; and there is but the thin veil of flesh between them and that amazing sight, that eternal gulph, and they are daily dying and stepping in.

But none, in idea, are more secure of life than the younger part of mankind. Fifty, threescore years of life to come, is a long, a very long prospect. And is it really so? Ah! yet remember, my young friends, remember, that time moves on with silent, but with rapid step. But are there no accidents, no disorders that can mow you down in the fair blossom of youth? Why should I recount the numberless diseases, that wage perpetual war against the frame
of

of man? Why must I remind you that man, born of a woman, has but a short time to live, and is full of misery? Why must I repeat it, that the grave is ever open, and that thousands, and ten thousands, of every age and sex, pass, without intermission, the ever mourning gate? But to persons of your age, death and repentance are gloomy considerations. These considerations, however, are most necessary; for again, and again I say it, your blooming years are an easy prey to death.

Judge for yourselves. Visit the solemn repositories of the dead, where multitudes, who have lived in ages past, repose in those silent chambers. Read the memorial of their age and death inscribed on the stone; and confess the melancholy truth, that more have descended to the grave in the flower of youth, than in a ripened old age. If then we have a spark of charity, if any compassion for human calamities, let us warn the young and the gay, let us call aloud as with the voice of a trumpet, and incite one another to immediate repentance, and a holy life.

While

S E R M O N XI. 203

While yet I speak, the sand of life is wasting fast away, Death fits his arrow to the string, and draws it closer and closer to the head. The mortal wound will be soon infixed. Repent and reform,

Soon shall the fairest beauty that ever charmed and delighted, fade away, and its finest tints will shrink at the cold blasts of death. Soon shall the florid cheek of youth be clothed in eternal pale; soon shall the proud be despoiled of his trophied vanity; soon shall the tongue that persuades, cease to articulate, and be dumb for ever; soon shall the preacher, who now addresses you with the most earnest wishes for your happiness, require the last office to his cold remains! May I be prepared before that dreadful day! May the whole tenour of my succeeding life be adorned with the Christian graces! Be this my praise! I ask no other—and that of every virtuous man in this assembly—that our heart shall never reproach us as long as we live.

You,

You, my brethren, whose hearts continue unreformed, with the most fervent charity, with the most yearning affection for your immortal souls, I exhort in the name of our common Lord and Master, to repent of your past misdeeds, while the day of salvation is not spent. If your tears flow from unaffected contrition, you have no cause to despair of mercy. The Lord is patient, and of long suffering. Your God is a gracious God. Wash ye, make you clean, cease to do evil, learn to do well; and though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; and though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

As to those who, during the vicissitudes of a long life, have been deaf to the repeated and importunate calls of the gospel, and are now bewailing their folly on a dying bed, I cannot, I dare not flatter them with expectation of pardon. I can only wish, from the bottom of my heart, that they may find mercy in this their last and perilous hour.

O that

S E R M O N XI. 205

O that men, therefore, would understand betime their true interest ! That they would early, and seriously consider their latter end ! So might they steadily, and without fear, behold the countenance of the pale horse and his rider : so, in their last agonies, the holy spirit would descend, like the dove to Noah, with the olive branch of consolation : so, like good old Simeon, they would depart in peace, while Christ through faith should whisper in the closing ear,—To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise. Amen.

SERMON

O that men, therefore, would understand
better their true interest! That they would
early and tenderly consider their latter end!
So might they flourish, and without fear,
behold the countenance of the pale, terrible
and hissing: for in their last agonies, the
holy spirit would defend, like the dove in
Noah, with the olive branch of consolation,
to the good old Simeon, they would depart
in peace, while Christ through faith should
whisper in the closing ear--To-day shall thou
be with me in Paradise. Amen.

S E R M O N XII.

ZEPHANIAH ii. 1, 2.

Gather yourselves together, ye gather yourselves together, O nation not desired. Before the decree bring forth, before the day pass as the chaff, before the fierce anger of the Lord come upon you, before the day of the Lord's anger come upon you.

THIS address of the prophet Zephaniah is designed to work upon the fears of his fellow-citizens, by a representation of God's impending judgments. No image of terror can be better conceived, or more fully described. We read, in the first place, a most earnest and persuasive exhortation; gather yourselves together, yea gather yourselves together, O nation not desired!

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The style is emphatical, and the same expression, twice repeated in the compass of one line, awakes the soul to the expectation of some important consequence. Then follows the alarming reason; before the decree bring forth.—The prophet speaks directly to the point—he does not say, before the decree shall be made—the decree was already formed; the cloud that bore the tempest in its womb was ready to burst, and overwhelm the guilty land. The second metaphor still enforces the former; before the day pass as the chaff, that is, before the day of vengeance swallow up the nation with the same inconceivable rapidity, as chaff, the lightest thing in nature, is swept away by the violence of a storm. The eloquent writer, having thus far conducted the sentence by a beautiful gradation of figures, speaks at last in plain terms the dreadful truth, which he aimed to inculcate; before the fierce anger of the Lord come upon you, before the day of the Lord's anger come upon you.

Thus

Thus it appears that Zephaniah, by divine inspiration, was favoured with a foreknowledge of the coming evil: and he entreats his countrymen with the love and earnestness of a real patriot, to avert the punishment threatened to their complicated transgressions, by gathering themselves together for the purpose of a general and devout humiliation.

We, my brethren, are assembled on a similar occasion. We are assembled to confess the multitude and variety of our offences, and to deprecate by a solemn and unaffected repentance, the calamities and the sorrows which they have drawn down on this distracted country from the justice of that uncontrollable being, whose judgments, at this time, are most assuredly abroad in the earth.

Such is the explanation of our text, and such, I apprehend, are the motives which have drawn the present congregation, at this critical, and awful period. To improve it into the best of consequences, to address your hearts, in all probability softened or terrified by the recent judgments of the Almighty, by

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the calamities of war, and the late prodigious devastation of the elements in the western region of the globe, is now the province of the preacher. Grant, O God, that he may speak with energy, with conviction on this great subject! Grant it for the welfare of thy dying creatures now bending low at the foot-stool of thy throne!

My brethren, you remember the declaration of our Redeemer; unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required. Employ your attention a moment on the advantages civil, religious, and commercial, which this nation possesses, or did possess, beyond the example of former times. Look back into historic annals, and trace the astonishing dispensations of Providence which have exalted this country to opulence, to empire, to glory. Our ancestors, when this island was first discovered by the Roman chief, were found in a state of barbarity, unacquainted with those sciences which polish and ennoble the mind, ignorant of those useful arts which supply the necessities of men, and strangers to that liberal intercourse which advances the

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the happiness of life. No well-regulated government was then established; nor was life and property then secured by the sanction of venerable laws. The command of priests, barbarous as that savage people, was the first object of their reverence, and the sword was their law. Their system of religion, if it deserves that honourable name, was superstitious in the extreme. A blind veneration for their Druids prevailed; a multiplicity of Gods was adored; and human victims, enemies whom the lot of war had made their captives, or children torn from the maternal breast, were sacrificed on their bloody altars. Such are the horrors of ignorance and superstition. Rude indeed as our progenitors were, the love of their country was ardent in their generous heart, and the principle of liberty, which has since glowed with so noble an enthusiasm among their descendants, was kindled in their daring bosoms. Their barren mountains, their uncultivated vallies, and their little huts were dear, because they were free. The gallant Roman found them, undisciplined indeed, but valiant in the
P 2 fight,

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fight, and obstinate in retreat. This love of freedom, however, this glorious defence of their country, was no compensation, no counterbalance for their uncivilization, their internal anarchy, their superstition, and their want of government. There we must look for the particular and collective happiness of a nation. And in these most essential objects the mercies of God have been singularly apparent.

Compare the miseries which must be experienced in the savage state, and the undescribable happiness which is diffused through every part of a well-administered kingdom. I will go farther; compare the oppressions and terrors which reign among the subjects of a despotic government, with the security and boldness which animate the possessors of liberty; then judge if any nation or people, since the beginning of time, were ever so distinguished by Providence as the inhabitants of Britain? The revolution of some ages has improved us, from the state of barbarity, just now mentioned, to the utmost degree of civilization,

lization, and knowledge; and, after violent and painful struggles, has settled the British government in its present excellent form, poised in the nicest equilibrium, and, in short, perfect as far as any thing human is capable of perfection. The arts of princes, however powerful, the intrigues of ministers, however politic, have not hitherto been able to extend the royal prerogative on the destruction of our civil liberties. A government, where the commons form an equally respectable branch of the legislature with the nobles, and the king, must rest on the sure basis of freedom. Hence the people acquire a significance, nay a majesty in the state, which secures them protection and reverence. To this impartial arrangement we are indebted for the establishment and execution of the wisest laws. The poor are no longer exposed to the wonton insolence of the rich. The noble, however splendid his birth, or large his possessions, is not allowed to violate with impunity the rights of the lowest individual. The laws undazzled by the glare of pomp, will vindicate the injured cause, and punish the proud oppressor. Hence every man may

eat the fruit of his own vine in peace. Hence the laborious peasant may cultivate his fields in security, and, when the daily toil is over, may sit in the circle of a chearful family made happy by his return, without the least apprehension that the rapacious hand of power will snatch away the well-earned profits of his industry. The British laws, as they are dictated by a spirit of wisdom and justice, are also tempered with mercy. Hence, while in other countries, even some of the most refined in Europe, where despotism tramples on the privileges of the subject, such as France, Spain, and Russia, life is forced out of the wretched criminal by lingering and exquisite torments; here, when the welfare of society demands the extinction of the guilty, the stroke of death is administered in the gentlest manner. Imprisonments at the mandate of a tyrannic king, secret assassinations by the dagger or by poison, midnight execution, familiar in absolute governments, have no existence in this land of liberty. Such are some of our civil advantages; such are the delicious fruits of that sound policy, which is far superior
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to the boasted republics of Greece and Rome, the pride of Englishmen, the envy of foreigners, and the admiration of mankind.

Thus are we blessed, through Providence, above all the nations of the earth, by our excellent political constitution, which renders our properties, our lives, and liberties inviolable. But there is another blessing, in whose absence the purest civil government would be extremely imperfect. The blessing I mean of worshiping God in spirit and in truth, the blessing of the Protestant Religion. Who but looks back with an eye of pity and indignation on that misertble æra, when conscience was fettered by the spiritual tyranny of the Roman pontiff: who, according to the verified prophecy of Daniel, did not regard any God, but magnified himself above all. The holy book, containing the word of eternal life, was withheld by the crafty priesthood from the laity, the service of God was performed in an unknown language, and every obstruction was artfully thrown to bar the avenues of truth. The reasons which dictated this conduct were obvious and substantial. The

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knowledge of the scriptures, circulated through Europe would soon have sapped the foundations of papal power; would soon have discovered to the astonished reader, how opposite to the purity of the Christian Religion was all its gaudy pomp of ceremonies; how useless was that service, in which a burdensome repetition of tedious forms was the only merit; would soon have pointed out the impiety of paying homage to the relics and images of saints; the vanity of interceding for the souls of the departed in a fabled purgatory; the futility of auricular confession; the absurdity of transubstantiation, and the falshood of those unnumbered legendary traditions, which gave to religion the semblance of a romantic tale, but which, unhappily, were but too well calculated to support the pillars of the Romish throne, and to maintain that incredible influence over the opinions of men, which it is known, the Popes exerted in the night of general ignorance. Ah! then, my brethren, the faggot and the wheel were employed to the most unjust and cruel of purposes, to bend the stubborn conscience, and to extort a confession of
 faith

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faith directly opposite to the evidence of reason. In that age of religious slavery, to doubt was the dungeon; to dissent was death. The compass of a discourse will not allow me to lay before you an historical account of those surprising events, which rescued us from spiritual oppression. The directing hand of providence was clearly marked in every step of this grand revolution. It is enough for us to taste its happy consequences. The Protestant Religion, as it flourishes in this country, is the fairest copy of primitive christianity. The liturgy of the church of England is a comprehensive form of worship, conceived in the simplest language, praying for all the wants of mortal creatures, full of elevated conceptions of the deity, and breathing an humble and devotional spirit. The church of England, imitative of that benevolence and charity which her God and Saviour has left her as an example, is now become a friend to universal toleration. No violence is offered to the tenderness of conscience; the bigot rage of persecution is for ever banished. Every man may worship the most high in a manner the most conformable to his

his

his own private ideas. The sacred volume, translated in the vernacular tongue, affords to the meanest person an opportunity of investigating truth, and of knowing what is that good and perfect will of God. Here no insidious priesthood pretend to tyrannize over the opinions of men; but the ministers of the Lord, in general, are distinguished by a liberal and well-informed understanding; and with what zeal, yea with what unction of language, yea with what unaffected seriousness are their public discourses delivered to their audience.

These are thy blessings, O thou most pure and divine christianity, reformed from the corruption of ages, and the abuse of men! and these blessings the British nation has enjoyed in the most eminent degree.

From the civil and religious, pass we to the commercial advantages of this country. From a state of mediocrity we have made a rapid advance to opulence and glory. The variety and extent of our conquests are not even rivalled by the antient Romans. Under Providence, the steady courage, and enterprising

prizing spirit of our valiant countrymen, have often checked the ambition of our enemies, and driven them by the terror of their formidable arm from every quarter of the globe. Our well-appointed navies covered the face of the ocean, and awed the subjected world. The treasures of the east and west were brought by each swelling tide into our crouded harbours. Hence the opulence of the nation, the enormous riches of individuals, and that general circulation, which was felt in some degree by every rank in the community. Hence too the magnitude of the metropolis, the magnificence of our towns, the number and splendour of our palaces; and hence the encouragement of those arts, which support the poor mechanic, and add grace and dignity to human life,

The natural advantages of this country claim also to be recorded with gratitude, whether we consider the singular conveniency of its situation with respect to universal commerce, or its fruitfulness and rural beauty, or the strength, genius, and number of its inhabitants, or the temperature of its air, never impregnated with those
 noxious

noxious particles which, in less fortunate climates, sweep thousands in a moment to the grave. Yet I will not dwell on these advantages, which, however considerable, are not of the least value without the enjoyment of civil and religious freedom. Yes, the frozen mountains of the utmost north, covered with eternal snows, would have more attractions for the generous mind, than the most delicious region, where slavery crouches to the tyrant power.

Now if there be a God who rules above, if there be a Providence concerned in the direction of human affairs; and that there is, the voice of reason and of the gospel explicitly affirm, then is the inference easy; we got not the land in possession by our own sword, neither did our own arm save us; but thy right hand, and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favour unto us. We did not rise to this summit of glory; we did not subdue and acquire such immense territories by the number and fortitude of our armies; our plan of internal government was not the mere suggestion of human wisdom; but thy

thy almighty arm led to conquest, and thy counsels informed. Thou hast not dealt so with any nation; and for thy judgments they have not known them.

Now, my brethren, a warm presumption arises, that a nation so enlightened by divine knowledge, so distinguished by the full enjoyment of that freedom which is denied to the largest portion of mankind, would make a suitable return to the father of mercies by its love to Religion, and its marked superiority of private and public virtues. I do not love to delineate the dark side of things; I do not love to bode evil to my country; but it is an obvious truth that we are fallen into that relaxation of morals, the sure concomitant, alas! of too long a succession of prosperity, which was the bane of ancient states. The unbounded flow of wealth, which has lately been poured into this county from the East, has corrupted the purity of our manners; and we have plunged in the stream of Asiatic luxury. The spring once contaminated, the waters will be poisoned to the remotest channel. It is no wonder, when they, who from their high

high station have a commanding influence, lead the sad example, that such a notorious want of sobriety, temperance, industry, and virtue, should disgrace the lower orders, the tradesmen, labourers, and mechanics. By a strange inversion of what is good and sacred, we abuse our liberty, and degrade our Religion. Liberty is made a cloak of licentiousness, patriotism self interest, and Religion a form. Instead of virtue behold libertinism, prophaneness, and debauchery. Principles, the most repugnant to the happiness of society, are avowed and published to the world. Christianity is boldly attacked by the deist, its system of morals is exposed as absurd, and its principal doctrines as improbable and unsupported. These authors, not contented with unsettling the religious opinions of their country, strive to rob her of her hopes of immortality. The temper and passions of the age are but too favourable to this species of composition. And while those chaste and sober writings, which plead the cause of Virtue and Religion, are perused with indifference, those pernicious books, which sport with the fame and character of others, are considered as the quintessence
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of wit and of genius; and those, which inflame and pollute the imagination, are eagerly sought, and read with avidity. The late rapid circulation of a certain work, the production (I blush to name it) of an unworthy minister of the Gospel, which is intended to subvert that conjugal union, on which experience has demonstrated public and private happiness to be founded, will be a perpetual witness to the licentious spirit of the present period. Another has made an impious attempt to divest the blessed Saviour of his divinity, and his mediatorial power; and, on the same level with Solon, Confucius, Mohammed, and the law-givers of old, has dared to place him, who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. The liberty of the press is a dear privilege to Englishmen—to retrench it in any degree is a delicate and alarming measure—but at the same time it were much to be wished that a seasonable check might be opposed to this torrent of licentiousness. For these principles and doctrines are soon brought forward into active life, and are the origin of that universal irreligion which is now so rife and prevalent. Shall not I visit them for these things,

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things, saith the Lord; shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?

The history of antient nations lays before the eye of posterity some dreadful examples of the just judgments of Almighty God. Recall to your memories the splendour riches, and population of those mighty empires which, in their turn, made so distinguished a figure on the theatre of the world. Have you forgot the vast domains of the capital of Assyria? Have you forgot the glory of the haughty Nebuchadnezzar, the voluptuous court of the soft Belsazzar? Have you forgot that when, in the height of jollity and merriment, the spirits flushed with wine and beauty, he lifted up himself against the Lord of heaven, the fingers of man's hand wrote on the wall these emphatic words, Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin; God has numbered thy kingdom, and finished it; thou art weighed in the balance and found wanting; thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians. And before that very night had run half her course, the city, surprized by the invading enemy, was deluged with blood

blood and death; and so completely levelled and demolished, that in the progress of years, the smallest traces of its existence were not to be found; the place where it stood was unknown; and the passenger might say, an heap of dust alone remains of thee. Turn your eyes to the republics and states of Greece, the nurse of arts and sciences, the chosen seat of philosophy. Where, alas! have that people vanished? degenerated from the virtues of their ancestors, they are swallowed up by the Turkish power, and nought remains of all their learning and glory—but an empty name. Turn next and weep over the lamentable siege of Jerusalem; a siege where the rage of famine was so irresistible, that all the ties of humanity and relationship were cut asunder; and the prophecy of Moses was dreadfully accomplished; the tender and delicate woman among you, which would not adventure to set the sole of her foot upon the ground for delicateness and tenderness, shall secretly eat the children which she bore. Think on that incredible desolation which ensued, when above a million of the Jews were slaughtered without mercy by the victorious and exasperated Romans; and the miserable

miserable remnant were dispersed in every quarter of the world, as we see them at this day, a despised and rejected people. But the conquerors, in their turn, absorbed in the most monstrous vices, enervated by luxury, and grown presumptuous by success, became at length fit objects of the divine vengeance. A swarm of Barbarians, issuing from the frozen north in search of happier climates, overran all Italy. Spoil, ruin, and havoc marked their fatal progress. Where is now majestic Rome? what is become of that proud capital, the dread of nations, and the mart of the world? where are its magnificent streets; its stupendous temples and palaces; its monuments of exquisite architecture? where is all that pomp and refinement? where are its senators, those sages, and law-givers? where are its demigods and heroes? and where those private citizens, whose wealth emulated that of potent kings? fallen is the mistress of the world, and scarce a mournful wreck is left behind.

Are such revolutions the effect of blind casualty, and not produced by the decrees of an over-ruling Deity? will the boldest enemy
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of Providence dare to assert it? apply to human wisdom; and ask of human wisdom, with all its boasted sagacity, when Rome was in the meridian of its glory, could have foreseen so mournful a revolution. It is worthy of observation, that God never punishes a nation till it is irreclaimably lost to virtue and religion. This appears to have been the unchangeable scheme of Providence; and it is consistent with infinite justice. Men are not always corrected in the present life, because a state of future retribution is appointed for individuals. But empires, as they have no existence beyond time, must be chastised, if at all, in this sublunar world.

The British nation ought to imbibe a lesson of wisdom from such awful examples; ought to derive instruction from these recorded events. Great, as I have said before, great are our privileges, great are our opportunities for knowledge and experience. But as we have trod in the footsteps of other empires less enlightened, the dangers which threaten this seemingly devoted country are more boundless and terrible. Far be it from me

to intimidate your minds by tinging them with superstitious fears. My aim is to mould them into proper sentiments of our situation, not to oppress them with vain alarms.

The serious observer would incline to suppose that the great God was meditating some important transaction to take place at this crisis, as a warning to the sons of men. The flames of war are kindled in most parts of the earth. The ambitious potentates of Europe are rushing to the dire contention. The American world is a scene of desolation; and the east, where the humanizing virtues are sacrificed to avarice, is stained with blood. And oh! what language shall I find to describe the horrors of those tremendous hurricanes, which, like a second deluge, have ravaged our West India settlements. How shall I paint the relentless fury of the elements, which combined, as it were, to sweep away the living from the face of the earth! how shall I depict the tempestuous sea, rushing in mountainous waves over the towns, the land and its produce, and defacing, in a moment, all the beauteous works of industry, the hopes of the laborious farmer, and

and the sanguine prospects of the merchant !
Hence nakedness, hunger, and beggary :
hence the destruction of respectable families,
and the loss of several thousand lives. O
empire of Britain, two things are come upon
thee, who shall be sorry for thee ? destruction
and desolation, the famine and the sword ; by
whom shall I comfort thee ?

War of itself, my brethren, unconnected
with other calamities, is a sufficient evil.
Then it is that the land mourns, and the
pleasant places of the wilderness are dried
up. Then it is that Rachel weeps for her
children, and will not be comforted, because
they are not. How many a firm patriot,
whose talents might have shone in the cause
of liberty ; how many a hero, whose valour
might have preserved his country ; how many
a tender husband, torn from the embrace of a
beloved wife ; how many a father, separated
from the dear objects of his affections ; how
many a youth, deplored by his mourning pa-
rents, with virtues ripened on his blooming
head, have been mowed down by the iron
hand of unsparing war ! Oh, thou sword of
the Lord, how long wilt it be e'er thou be

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quiet? put thyself up into thy scabbard; rest and be still!

The crying sins of individuals are the grand original of these calamities. Lay it to heart, my brethren, lay it to heart; and let it produce that sincere and general reformation, which yet may save this country, and stop the destroying angel whose sword is now extended over the land. Rend your hearts and not your garments. When Jonah cried, yet forty days and Nineveh shall be destroyed; the people of Nineveh believed in God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest even to the least; for, said they, who can tell if God will repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not. Let us then, my dear brethren, and fellow-citizens, if we reverence the majesty of heaven and earth; if we are attached to the gospel of Jesus Christ; if we have a spark of public virtue; if we love our country, our relatives, and ourselves; let us give a bright example to the rest of the world, by a serious repentance, and a consequent reformation of manners. May religion, and the moral virtues, may charity, benevolence, sincerity, justice, temperance, and honesty flourish
among

among us to the latest generations. May intestine dissensions, and party rage, sink to their native hell; and may harmonious concord bless the empire through all its connections. And thou, O peace serene, too long, alas! estranged and banished from this weeping realm, return, at last return, and bring in thy smiling train sweet plenty, domestic happiness, and public joy. And, by the favour and the grace of God, may we behold a realization of those blessings which the Psalmist has enumerated as attendant on a religious people; that our sons may grow up as the young plants, and that our daughters may be as the polished corners of the temple; that our garners may be full and plenteous with all manner of store; that our sheep may bring forth thousands, and ten thousands in our streets; that our oxen may be strong to labour; that there be no decay, no leading into captivity, and no complaining in our streets. Happy are the people that are in such a case; yea blessed are the people who have the Lord for their God.

...to the fact, gentlemen, May in-
terest, diffidence, and party rage, that to their
active bell, and may harmonious concord bless
the camp, through all its convulsions. And
that O people, too long, alas! oppressed
and afflicted, from this weary, weary, weary
and long, and bring in thy smiling rain
water plenty, domestic happiness, and public
good. And the favour, and the grace of
God, may we behold a realization of those
blessings which the Father has enumerated as
attendants on a religious people; that our
may grow up as the well-planted, and that
our children may be in the promised corner
of the land; that our enemies may be full
and gloried with all manner of grief; that
our flock may bring forth thousands; and that
our strength be full, that our own may be
strong to honour; that there be no delay, no
leading into captivity, and no conspiring to
put them. Happy are the people that are in
such a case, as blessed are the people who
have the Lord for their God.

S E R M O N XIII.

MATTHEW xviii. 23.

Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king which would take account of his servants.

THE Gospel is not only a system of Religion, but is also a code of morality. The great preacher Jesus Christ does not confine himself to spiritual subjects, but takes various opportunities of instructing his hearers in the conduct of life. This was necessary. Men, when they have learned the religious duties, require information in those which they owe to one another. This knowledge is of no small importance to human happiness, and accordingly we find it clearly displayed to our capacities in the New Testament. The duty which

which I propose to treat of, the duty of forgiveness, may be ranked among the most useful and illustrious that occur in the commerce of life. The mention of it was thus occasioned : The Apostle Peter asked, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him, until seven times ? The Jews, by misconstruing the purport of their holy law, had by degrees contracted a stern, a gloomy, and unforgiving spirit. Friends only to those of their religious persuasion, they looked on the rest of mankind as enemies. Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thy enemy, was among them a favourite maxim. The answer made by Jesus to Peter's question was intended to reform this malevolent principle : I say not unto thee until seven times, but until seventy times seven. Then, in support of so benignant a doctrine, he introduces that most excellent parable of a certain king, who would take an account of his servants.

I shall take a particular view of this beautiful part of the Gospel.

The parable continues : And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him
which

which owed him ten thousand talents. The beings, shadowed out by a certain king and his servants, are God and human kind. The creature is indebted for all its possessions to the Almighty Creator : Man has not subsisted, like the Father of heaven and earth, from all eternity. His original is not less certain than his existence. Nor could he be instrumental to his own production ; God only could breathe the living soul into the inanimate clay, and form a being so complete and so admirable. The workmanship proclaims the infinite power of its author. Life, then, and reason, health and beauty, strength and riches, comfort and happiness, the temporal advantages, faith and hope, redemption and immortality, the spiritual blessings, are derived to men from him who is the supreme fountain of benevolence. Thus, his goodness having called into existence, and placed men in the world, did not leave him, like a forlorn creature in a wilderness, to roam unprotected, but answers all his wants, and watches with providential care over all his steps. This is the sum of that boundless debt pictured by Jesus Christ under the image of a servant who owed to his Lord the enormous amount of ten thousand talents. This debt, even

even the debt of life and protection, can never be repaid to our merciful benefactor; but, though always paying, is still to pay. Nor is it lessened by the least obligation to men on the part of his Creator; nor can the felicity of the eternal be encreased by the imperfect services of mankind, so great is the distance between omnipotence and mortality. A warm, affectionate, and cordial gratitude, manifested by an humble piety, and a constant series of moral virtues, is the only return that can be made by mortal creatures in their fallible and impotent state, for so many unspeakable tokens of the divine love. But alas! this evidence of a grateful heart is by no means the prevalent colour through the life of man. Destitute of that excellent character, his abilities and endowments being grossly perverted, he may be justly said to have nothing to pay.

But for as much as he had not to pay his Lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made.

From time to time, the great King takes account of his servants, in their collective and particular

particular capacity, as states and individuals. The advantages, civil or religious, granted to a favoured people, and by them misapplied to the purposes of vice and ungodliness, have never failed to draw down the vengeance of heaven. A noisome pestilence has walked among the inhabitants, war has ravaged their cities and provinces, or some other grievous calamity, appointed by the righteous judgment of God, has befallen. But on the least proof of a national repentance, on the smallest prospect of returning virtue, the hand of destruction has been averted, and the long-suffering of God has again been conspicuous. And although their Lord commanded them to be sold, and their wives and children, and all that they had, and payment to be made, yet, as we shall observe in the sequel, he was moved with compassion, and forgave them the debt. I shall not point to particular instances; you may find them abundantly in sacred and profane history. His patience with regard to individuals is not less remarkable. Who among the race of men is free from guilt? Who does not provoke God every day? Who does not abuse his mercies?—Few, if any, my brethren, have answered the chief end of their being. How many

many, fascinated by opulence and prosperity, by the pomps and vanities of the present world, have by degrees almost forgot their dependence on the Creator! How many have led, even from their earliest manhood, an impure, boisterous, and intemperate life! How many are grown old in the arts of circumvention, fraud, and duplicity! How many, influenced by their corrupt nature, and under various but fatal pretences, have for a series of years abstained from the public worship! How many, exulting in the full pride of science and philosophy, have treated with contempt the redemption of mankind by a Saviour, and blasphemed that worthy name by the which they are called! How many, and it is to be feared, the bulk of Christians, confide in the glowing health and spirits of youth, live careless of their God, and seldom or never drop a reflection on fatuity, and that day when the King shall reckon with his servants!

His gifts and talents thus wasted and abused, by his ungrateful children, should God, inexorably severe in justice, be extreme to mark what is done amiss, not only these sinners should be hurried

hurried away to instant punishment, but there is not a man breathing on the surface of the earth who could stand the issue of that dreadful period.

The servant therefore fell down and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me and I will pay thee all. The moment of calamity, that trying moment, rallies all those serious thoughts and reflections, which the dissipation and levity contracted by a commerce with the world, had exiled from the careless mind. Visited by the divine chastisements, the soul, lost before to wisdom and virtue, is recalled to a consciousness of its real condition. Then it begins to consider, how the great duties, for which God gave it a being, have been discharged; and, keenly sensible of its time mispent in vice and folly, and feeling its nakedness of all moral and religious ornaments, cannot but tremble at its approaching fate. Then falls that deceitful mask of beauty and allure-ment, which the world had cast over its own deformities. Then dies away the voice of the harlot pleasure, which before had persuaded and engrossed the yielding heart. Then droops the haughty spirit of arrogance and self-sufficiency.

ciency. Then appears, unobscured by any shade, the weakness and imbecility of man, the boundless love of God, before unheeded, and the transcendent excellence of the Redeemer, before unregarded. Glad to fly from the retrospect of a life, which can afford no comfort or satisfaction in the perusal, at a time when they are most desirable, and to lean on the hope of redeeming grace for pardon, the afflicted penitent cries, Lord, have patience with me and I will pay thee all; O change the sentence of death into life, and protract the days of thy servant to a longer date, that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice, that I may live to bless thy holy name, and to walk in the paths of thy commandments, from which I had before unhappily wandered. Is not this the natural voice of the sinner, when he touches on the threshold of death? And, repeated experience confirms it, that often when the skill of the ablest physician had proved ineffectual, and nature seemingly exhausting was verging to its dissolution, health has unexpectedly returned, strength has braced again the languid nerves, and life has been restored in all its regular and animated functions. The operation of this wonderful revivescence must

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must be evidently ascribed to eternal Providence ; which, although justly incensed by daily provocations, and about to inflict the meditated punishment, yet, kindly listening to the bitter repentance of his creature, says to the king of terrors, stay thy hand, and save a soul alive which must else have perished in its sins and imperfections. Then the Lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. This is a strong instance, which, I doubt not, many of my present hearers can confirm, among others which might be recorded of the supreme benevolence and compassion. Not a day, indeed, elapses in the course of a short revolving year unstained by sin ; not a day therefore is undistinguished by heavenly mercy. The blessed Saviour having thus justly represented the God of truth in his glorious attributes of grace and mercy, now descends into the walks of human life, and draws a most striking contrast to this pleasing and lovely picture.

But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow servants which owed him an hundred pence ; and he laid his hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, pay me

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what thou owest. And his fellow servant fell down at his feet and besought him, saying have patience with me and I will pay thee all, and he would not, but went and cast him into prison till he should pay the debt.

Man, unmindful of the various benefits which he daily receives from the bountiful hand of his God, forgetting his own instability, and not reflecting on that mercy of which he stands in need from above, exacts atonement and satisfaction from his offending brother to the utmost point. Trivial faults are construed into the effects of a deep malignity by the magnifying optics of rugged and obstinate humours, as objects through a mist are enlarged beyond the life. A slight affront once offered to their dignity is not easily forgiven. Now a great portion of this implacable spirit takes its origin from pride, one of the most disgusting passions. Too much in love with ourselves, and possessing a high ideal importance, we fondly expect to command the same respectability in the opinion of others. Blind to those glaring defects, which the world clearly sees, and which alloy the brightness of our virtues, but infinitely over-
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rating the natural and accidental beauties of our understandings or bodies, as a fond parent doats even on the faults, and prizes beyond all bounds the good qualities of a favourite child, we think ourselves entitled to greater attention from our fellow-creatures than we really are. Hence offences, of no very deep dye in themselves, and which might soon have been buried in oblivion, had they not unfortunately touched on the delicate chords of our vanity, are pursued with revengeful severity. Whereas, in the true estimate of things, we are of small consideration; the world might very well go on without us; men would be as chearful and happy; the affairs of life would be transacted with as much regularity and convenience; the same food would be provided for the hungry, and the same clothes for the naked. Wit, genius, and learning, if we possess them, are common to many others who eclipse us in those valuable qualities; the renown of our name is only known to a small circle of acquaintance; and we are hardly mentioned beyond the limits of our little habitations. Pride ought to subside at the recollection, and the big heart, from this bold and free view of its own insignificance, should be

taught not hastily to take exceptions at light injuries, much less to revenge them.

There is another principle of revenge, which the world has concealed under the specious and heroic appellation of honour. This unfortunate term, so wantonly misapplied, has done infinite mischief. The worst adopt it, as they have as just a claim to retaliation as the best of men. Hence the most worthless characters, who are so far from having any pretensions to honourable respect, that their very existence is a reproach to human nature, will ask with affected dignity, on the least altercation, if you mean to affront their honour? Conscious, at the same time, that every person who hears them is acquainted with their ill reputation. I mention this to shew the dangerous tendency of screening an odious passion under a respectable name. It is to be lamented that some of conspicuous rank, and of a fame in other points of view unblemished, have given it the sanction of their example. At the stern mandate of this tyrannical honour, the most antient and happy connections have been suddenly cut asunder; friends, who were lovely and pleasant
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in their lives, have rushed upon the point of each other's sword, and perhaps entailed insuperable woes upon their families, because this rigid honour commanded them to take vengeance, at the price of life itself, for an unguarded expression dropped in the heat of argument, and capable, in a cooler moment, of being explained to their mutual satisfaction. This, notwithstanding the opinion of an injudicious world, is no document of real courage, and for this plain reason: The mind hurried away by a thirst after revenge, and a gust of tumultuous passions, has no ability for other reflections, and is insensible of its danger. Call not then this mode of vindication by the name of courage, but of revenge; call it the cruel servant whose constant voice is, pay me that thou owest.

To revenge an offence is not in general a difficult matter; but to support it with calm forbearance is the effort of a noble mind. Philosophers have always accounted it a more exalted act of heroism to subdue the passions, than to triumph over a host of enemies. Here the victory is peculiarly glorious. The keen resent-

ment which wrings the very heart at an unprovoked injury, must be instantly suppressed, and replaced with the mild spirit of benevolence : This undoubtedly is an arduous lesson, and must cost many a hard struggle in bosoms prone to anger. He, therefore, whose enlarged soul, full of Christian kindness to his brethren, can hush the whirlwind of passion roused by unexpected injuries ; who restrains the turbulent emotions of vindictive fury in their birth, and grants a liberal forgiveness from his heart to an adversary ; he is the true hero. Crowns, stars, and garters cannot ennoble such a generous character ; a character as great and glorious in the abodes of poverty, as in the palaces of opulence ; save indeed that the latter is more famed in the annals of human praise, from the circumstances of his station ; and the former perhaps is only known to the searcher of hearts, who will reward them both with an equal degree of future happiness.

The man of a candid and forgiving spirit tastes an abundance of felicity here below, in the decision of his conscience, that whispers applause to the deed ; in the love which his fellow

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low creatures bear to the sweetness of his disposition ; and in that superiority acquired, by a voluntary pardon, over his enemy. By that single act of uncompelled and disinterested mercy, an assemblage of good qualities is disclosed ; as flowers, whose leaves were contracted before, are expanded in all their fragrant beauty by the rising sun. The first dramatic poet of our nation, and a perfect judge of human nature, has a fine passage relative to my subject, which, if it be allowed me here, I shall beg leave to quote ; not but I think a moral sentiment may be produced from any writer without apology :

The quality of mercy is not strain'd,
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven,
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest'd ;
It blesteth him that gives, and him that takes.

Thus greatly forgiven, the offender must see and feel his own littleness, and admire your towering excellence. In base unfriendly minds, indeed, this conscious inferiority will only serve to embitter the wound of deadly hatred ; and he that did the wrong will loath in secret the

sight of his benefactor, which calls his attention to those virtues, of which his own soul is barren. Some tempers are so cruel, obstinate, and malicious, that a thousand acts of kindness and beneficence lavished on them, are fruitless as the seed which falls on rocky ground. The most solid substance in nature, which can receive no form or polish from the inventive artist, is not more impenetrable than the hard heart of ingratitude. But on a disposition humanized and Christian, a deed of generosity is never lost. The culture of the husbandman on a fertile spot of ground is not bestowed in vain, but received with benignity, and repaid with abundance. He who before was your foe, by your judicious and humane conduct, is converted into a faithful friend; he is not ashamed to acknowledge, as he discerns your merit, and to confess himself vanquished by this unmerited instance of your forgiving love. The epistle to the Romans has expressed the happy effects, which succeed a good-natured action of this kind, by a very proper metaphor: Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath; for it is written, vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord,

Lord. Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Thy kindness and beneficence will melt down his hatred and anger, as metal is dissolved by coals of fire placed on the head of the crucible. All private revenge, says a fine writer of sermons, and consequently the desire of it too, is in the nature of the thing unlawful; since, if it were allowed, it would draw a fatal train of consequences after it, and make the world an aceldama, or field of blood.

Men, in whose constitutions the seeds of passion are soon blown into rage and vehemence, are incited by this hastiness of temper to make instant reprisals. Others again, whose sensibility is equally alarmed at an injury, but whose head is cooler, will defer the execution of their revenge to a proper opportunity, looking forward all the while with silent pleasure to the day of ample retaliation. These characters are both very dangerous to the peace of their fellow-creatures. The former, in the tempest of fury, may be guilty of so many wrongs and outrages, as will lay in a store of
unquiet

unquiet reflections for all his future days; or he may be the cause of a misery, for which his sorrow and acknowledgement, or even his wonted good-nature when the storm has spent its rage, will make but an ill compensation. I shall lay before you another quotation from the above-mentioned author: As to men of passion and fury, they indeed will tell you, God forgive them, it is their infirmity which they cannot help, they are apt to be transported into unseemly words and actions, but the storm is soon over. These are the excuses of those, who, when their anger has spent itself, are very good-natured, and continue so till fresh recruits of spirits enable their passions to take the field again; and they might serve well enough for those fierce animals who must be held with chains and bridles, lest they fall upon you; but they come with a very ill grace from the mouth of those, who call themselves reasonable creatures.

The latter character is still more dreadful, I am sure it is more detestable. The first transports of fury we may sometimes avoid; but no art or precaution can secure us from the deep-

deep-laid schemes and malice of the deliberate revenger. For months and years resentment will prey upon his implacable heart. And, although he has time to meditate on the nature of the offence, time to call in prudence and religion to his aid, time for the soft movements of pity to operate, time to get the better of his anger, if the feelings of humanity had not entirely deserted him, the desire of vengeance is still uppermost in his soul, and on a proper opportunity he will not fail to reckon severely with his unprovided brother, who perhaps had forgotten a fault so long ago committed, and had not a trace of malice remaining in his heart. In this he resembles those savage beasts, which, as natural historians inform us, once attacked and wounded, never quit the pursuit of their devoted enemy, till their rage be appeased with his blood. Such principles are neither manly nor Christian-like, but contradictory to that gospel, whose very essence is harmony, love, and union, and whose precepts are always conceived in the following strains: Ye have heard that it has been said an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth; but I say unto you, that ye resist not evil; love your enemies,

bless

blefs them that curfe you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully ufe you and perfecute you, that ye may be the children of your father which is in heaven.

In the lift of unmerciful avengers the evil-speaker muft be claffed. This vice, the vice of coward and worthlefs minds, is not lefs reprobated in fcripture than thofe already fpecified. Corroded by envy, provoked by neglect, and difgusted by fome real or imaginary affront, the evil-speaker does not take an active revenge, becaufe he wants the power; but compenfating impotence with subtlety, he difcharges the venom of his malice on the reputation of the offender in his abfence. Afraid to avow his hatred openly, and demand redrefs, he pleafes his revengeful heart with covertly undermining the character of his adverfary by dark infinuations and defaming flanders; as fome poifons, flowly gradual, excite no fufpicion, but are not the lefs fatally certain. Brethren, fays St. James, fpeak not evil of one another.

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But if a forgiving spirit be deemed a blessing to a man in his dealings with the world abroad, how equally requisite will it be found in the little government of his family. There he meets with daily occasions of exercising this mild temper by mutual forbearance, and a constant exchange of good offices, and of making his house the residence of calm content and sweet felicity. But if every untoward accident, if every thing that does not exactly meet his inclinations and desires, is capable of kindling his immoderate passions, home, which ought to be the center of his happiness, will be the dungeon of his misery. Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith. Peace and gentleness of temper will render those of the same family happier, though their fare be simple, than a luxurious table with quarrels and contention.

The acquisition of this generous and placable spirit, therefore, is enjoined to those who profess the name of Jesus Christ. The good order and well being of society depend upon its prevalence; because without it the earth would be a scene of animosity and bloodshed.

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It must needs be that offences come. Man is by nature frail; and if we construe all that is done or said against us into an unpardonable injury, we shall be occupied with nothing but plans of revenge through a life of fifty or sixty years.

Attend we now to the conclusion of the parable. So when his fellow servants saw what was done, they were sorry, and came and told unto their Lord all that was done. Then his Lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me; shouldst thou not also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee? And his Lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.

Mercy and compassion, as I have shewn already, are the attributes of the Divinity, which he every day extends to his creatures in the remission of their sins, and the protection of their lives. We ought then to copy after these godlike perfections, and not despise the
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riches of our Creator's goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering; like that cruel servant, who, scarcely risen from the feet of his Lord, and the last words which absolved him from the heavy debt but just pronounced, seized his fellow-servant who only owed him an hundred pence, and, unmoved by his tears and entreaties, cast him into prison.

With what reason can we expect that mercy from God, which we have refused to others? There shall be judgment without mercy, says an Apostle, to them who shew no mercy. Why do we wrong one another, since we are brethren, all travelling in company through a troublesome life to the common grave; feeble, erring, and assailed in the journey by various disasters, which ought to be alleviated by mutual gentleness and unanimity. We ought to bear and not aggravate each other's infirmities. We ought to be kindly affectioned one to another, forgiving one another. If any man has a quarrel against any, even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye; and thus prepare your souls for the enjoyment of that promised state, where the benevolent affections shall be displayed in
their

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their fullest extent, and the rude alarms of human passions shall disquiet us no more.

But if, after these considerations, you can still deny the most unlimited forgiveness to your fellow creatures, expect to hear that just sentence denounced against you at the day of judgment : O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me ; shouldst thou not also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee ? Depart from me into everlasting fire.

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